COACH AND BUS WEEK

CBW

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OPTARE TO GROW WITH PUSH INTO EUROPE

OPTARE says it met all its targets and budgets in 2005 and is set to grow by 10% in 2006 – partly with sales to the European mainland.

The Leeds-based manufacturer – the UK's third largest – last year cornered 17% of the total bus and coach market with sales of 630 vehicles and turnover of £63 million. This year, its MD Bob Coombes (pictured right) says £70 million turnover is on the cards.

Central to its success in the last 12 months has been the Solo, which was the best-selling bus in its sector: "There are now 2,000 Solos on the UK's roads," Mr Coombes told *CBW*.

The left-hand drive Solo first shown at Kortrijk, Belgium, three years ago has spearheaded the sales drive: "We have already sold it into Denmark [where Arriva has substantial operations] and Holland," said Mr Coombes. "Now it looks as if Germany is interested. Interest in Solo is such that the demonstrator is booked until August. We have a lot of momentum going into Europe."

Mr Coombes said its Tempo single-deck, shown this year at Kortrijk, has generated interest from European operators but Optare would await a serious order before committing to moving the driving position. After-sales support and parts stock in Europe is provided by the huge TSN supply network.

The UK support group Unitec was another of the Optare group's success stories, growing 18% is sales revenue and from 70 employees to 120 in the last two years. Developments this year will include an on-line parts system with a fully electronic catalogue, available on the internet or on CD-ROM. A fourth service centre – complementing Rotherham, Thurrock and Cumbernauld – is being sought in the Bristol/Gloucestershire area.

New launches this year will include the Toro midicoach launched at last year's Coach and Bus Live, and a restyled Solo in shorter lengths. Mr Coombes said that although the double-deck programme is still on ice, Optare would be sticking with the Alero.

"We have addressed its shortcomings – one of which related to an Iveco problem - but still await its commercial success. It is now a very different vehicle than when we launched it in 2000, but we need more support from the welfare sector.

"Nine out of ten small vehicles sold into local authorities are high-floor, and we are now pressing for legislation to introduce lowfloor of a progressive nature, phased into the market. We've spent £3 million in developing Alero, and we don't want to see it wasted."

WORMWELL ONWARDS AND UPWARDS

DENIS Wormwell, chief executive of NatEx, is moving to the NEG UK bus division, to head up its operations in the West Midlands, Dundee and London. He will be replaced by Paul Bunting, currently managing director of Midland Mainline, one of NEG's train operators. Both appointments take effect officially from 1 February 2006, although neither is expected to take up their positions until the end of the month.

Denis, 44, joined National Express four years ago and has been responsible for the rebranding of business and credited with the development of its customer-service led culture. Paul Bunting, 46, has been with Midland Mainline since February 2004. He has worked in the transport sector for his whole career – previously with Stagecoach, First, and in a number of senior roles within British Rail.

POLICE STUMPED BY BUS ACCIDENTS

POLICE are no closer to finding out how a 12-year-old schoolboy fell through the window of an Optare Delta operated by Ridgways of Port Talbot.

The accident, three weeks ago, saw the window fall out on a supported bus service run by the nine-vehicle operator, and the boy sustain serious head injuries. Operator Darren Ridgway said the vehicle was tested immediately by the Police and VOSA, and returned to him after two days with no defects. However, other children on the vehicle have denied any knowledge of how the accident happened.

Mr Ridgway praised the Confederation of Passenger Transport's Crisis Control service, which handled all his press inquiries after the incident.

● TWO boys who fell from a bus in Aberdare are sustained only minor injuries and were returned home after a short stay in hospital. It is still not officially confirmed how the 14-year-olds fell through the rear window of the Shamrock Travel bus on their way home from school.

Eyewitness reports suggest the two were "engaged in a scuffle".

MASSIVE FIRE AT FIRST DEPOT

A FIRE on Sunday morning at First London & Berkshire's Westbourne Park garage destroyed ten deckers and damaged six more. First is not releasing the estimated cost of the damage. Police quickly arrested a 15 year old boy in connection with the incident.

The blaze among the tightly packed buses caused a plume of smoke to rise above West London, likened by observers to the recent Buncefield oil depot fire in Hemel Hempstead.

The garage re-opened just two and a half hours later with some bus services suffering "slight" delays. However a full service ran the day after. Twelve replacement vehicles were brought in: six from East Thames Buses, and six from other First locations.

Three vehicles were on fire when the services attended, but the blaze quickly spread to the others following a series of explosions. Eight fire engines attended the scene.

The bus garage is situated underneath the A40, which closed until around 12.00. Local roads around the area were also closed but re-opened at 13.35. There was a limited evacuation of residential properties in the area and others were warned to stay indoors.

First supplied CCTV footage to police and the boy was arrested near to the scene in the early afternoon. He has been bailed to return on 9 February.

Stone-throwing causes service cut

CLARKES of London has suspended stops in Cliffe, Kent, after a two-year spate of attacks on its commuter coaches.

The Hoo-London service, which has been running 19 years, picks up in Cliffe on the morning run but now sets down a mile from the village so it can avoid stone-throwing which has smashed windscreens and caused tens of thousands of pounds in damage.

General manager Terry Newman said local children were the culprits, and appealed to their parents to 'read them the riot act' or risk losing a service they may one day need: "One day they might need to catch a coach to come to work, and it won't be there for them," Mr Newman warned.

Despite Clarkes and a local schools service operator complaining about the attacks to schools and to local police, so far the culprits have evaded arrest.

● Attacks on buses in Midlothian have prompted police to issue a 'shop a vandal' text message service.

Four buses have been hit in the Lauder Road area of Dalkeith, while Westhouses, Newtongrange and Loanhead have also been hotspots. But police say the stone-throwing is the work of a few ringleaders, and that innocent children in the 'gangs' can shop the guilty with a single text message.

Stoke v First - round two

PRESSURE group Transport 2000 has waded into the row between First PMT and Stoke City Council (see *CBW* 711). It is threatening to write to Alistair Darling unless the two start constructive talks over the congestion and bus service issues that have provoked a bitter row, often in the pages of the local newspaper.

Transport 2000 has been critical of the Council in the past for what it sees as a lack of investment in public transport infrastructure. First agrees, blaming the problems in Stoke on chronic congestion, whilst the Council blames First for pulling services and changing timetables.

David Redgewell, national policy advisor for Transport 2000, says, "This is a public service and we need a partnership that works. If we can't see progress with a partnership we will write to the Secretary of State asking him to create one."

"It is no good having exchanges of views in the local newspaper. If Stoke-on-Trent wants to compete in Europe it has got to grasp its transport problems and it cannot afford to have such disagreements."

Transport 2000 is calling for the council to enter a Public Private Partnership (PPP) with the bus company – such as already exists in Hereford and Worcester.

Holiday hijack

A COACH load of UK tourists bound for their hotel were robbed at gunpoint shortly after arriving in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, last Thursday night (19 Jan). Three armed men boarded the vehicle and demanded wallets, passports and credit cards.

None of the 33 passengers were injured, and they have all continued their trip – a luxury three week break around Argentina and Brazil, organised by Sussex-based Horse Racing Abroad.

Bus pass scam

A BROTHER and sister team face jail after defrauding TfL of over £27,000 in a bus pass scam in West London. The newsagent workers cancelled passes issued to customers by placing a blank ticket over the pass as it was re-fed through the machine. Since the tickets were never used on an automated system the cancelled tickets were never spotted by drivers or the passengers.

The pair then pocketed the money for themselves. The scam, which ran for just three months, was uncovered when bosses of the newsagent chain noticed that cancellations at that branch were nearly fifty times higher than at other branches.

The chain has repaid the money to TfL, less 5%.

Stop press

TYNE & WEAR PTA has postponed the meeting where it was to consider Nexus' controversial budget plans for 2006/07.

Nexus has a £7m deficit in its Concessionary Fares scheme and was looking to claw much of that back from other services (see *CBW712*).

It was to take place on 26 January but will now be on 8 February, following encouraging noises from government about making up the shortfall.

Editor's comment

Drivers back to school?

IT SEEMS a very short time since I penned a comment piece marking the death of schoolboy Stuart Cunningham-Jones, who fell to his death from a Welsh school bus.

It is, then, alarming that we report not one but two incidents of Welsh children falling from bus windows on the home-to-school journey. The exact circumstances are under investigation, but it appears that in one incident, bad behaviour was a factor.

We are only weeks into the new term, and it seems to me that the children of Wales are overdue another refresher course in the consequences of unruly behaviour aboard buses. It needs once again to be pointed out to them that the end result can be the death of innocent people, whether through the distraction of the driver or misuse of the emergency exits.

This is an issue which refuses to go away. We have been round the houses, discussing seatbelts, CCTV, school escorts and all manner of methods of reducing the risk, but at the end of the day, none of this would be necessary if schools and parents exercised some discipline over the minority of children who misbehave.

My thoughts are always with the drivers. Bad behaviour on some routes makes it absolutely impossible for them to do their job properly, and it is no surprise when you hear stories of them pulling over and exerting their own influence over the situation.

However, there is some need for the industry to take a look at the support it offers school bus drivers. Good training is a real asset, offering staff better ways of dealing with groups of children and ultimately giving everyone an easier ride.

There can be few people better qualified to do this than the best of the teaching profession, and as a means of strengthening the ties between operator and school, brokering such an exchange of knowledge would be highly productive on several levels.

Mark Williams

Mark Williams
EDITOR

COUNTDOWN STARTS FOR DIGITACH

Operators reconsider new coaches as EU insists on May introduction

Digital tacho industry ready, but operators are not

DIGITAL tachographs are to become mandatory in the UK from May, though the Department for Transport hasn't announced a precise date.

The issue is now being forced by European Commission vice president in charge of transport policy, Jacques Barrot, after four years of false starts. It will have a significant impact on the coach industry.

From May, all new vehicles will have to be supplied with digitach, and operators will have to have the hardware and software in place even if the rest of the fleet has a paper-disc tacho.

Drivers will have to have applied for and received driver cards in time, and all staff will have to be trained to use both the driver card and company card. The Freight Transport Association has calculated this process to take five months before the vehicle can be used.

But most UK coach operators will have had the summer's fleet replacements delivered by May, and there are signs that many will delay any further vehicle investment for at least a year.

"Everyone is holding off for as long as possible," said Steve O'Neill, MD of The Kings Ferry. "We did consider fitting digital tachographs early, but then decided it would be a cost which would be almost unique to us.

"I think digital tachograph will be a good thing, but the costs are high at £400 per vehicle unit, driver cards at £35 each, plus several thousand pounds for the computer infrastructure and training."

Scania Bus and Coach confirmed that the announcement will alter the vehicle buying pattern: "From our point of view, we are expecting operators to begin looking for stock, registered vehicles. Generally, operators are fighting tooth and nail against introducing digital; they don't like it.

"But it's going to happen. I can see how difficult it will be to set up. We're applying for the cards and setting our drivers up. Once again, it's legislation that only affects the best operators."

"This is good news in that it narrows the scale to May," said Robin Dickeson, manager, commercial vehicle affairs at the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders. "But sadly and typically, there is still an element of uncertainty, as no-one seems able to put a date on the publication of the Official Journal and that determines the precise date for the new law. – *mark.williams@rouncymedia.co.uk*

WHAT WILL IT COST?

ONE operator who has looked at costs very closely is Epsom Coaches. Director Steve Whiteway told *CBW*: "I initially too the view that I'd rather convert everything to digital, but when I got the quotes in, that idea fell apart.

"The nominal cost for the tachograph is £800, but as many vehicles have the tachograph combined with the speedometer, it's not s straight swap. Taking out the old speedo/tacho and replacing it with both a digital tacho and speedo takes the cost closer to £1,500 per vehicle. The truck market anticipated this and has built slot-in units for some time – a straight swap for digital."

Mr Whiteway said some costs, such as training, are hard to nail down, but major costs are:

- Driver/company digital cards - £38 each
- Conversion from analogue tachos - £1,500 per vehicle
- Hardware/software for downloading data - £5,000
- Half-day training and refreshers - around £100 per driver

How the news arrived

IN A letter to all member states on January 19, Jacques Barrot re-affirmed the EC's position on mandatory introduction of digital tachographs and confirmed May as the ultimate date. He has requested detailed and complete overviews of preparations put in place by all member states by March 1, accompanied by a confirmation they will be ready to put the necessary arrangements in place by May.

Mr Barrot said: "The digital tachograph is indispensable for enforcing driving times and rest periods of professional drivers. Its introduction will improve road safety and the social conditions of drivers in Europe. It is important to co-ordinate its introduction which must happen at the latest by May 2006".

The introduction of a clear and firm deadline is dependent on co-ordination of all relevant submissions from member states and the implementation date cannot be earlier than 20 days after the publication of the legal text in EU Official Journal.

After this date Member States will be obliged to enforce the relevant provisions. In practice this will mean that new vehicles registered after that date and which do not have an operating digital tachograph can be blocked at any time. Drivers who drive without a driver card risk prosecution.

Digital tachographs are now widely available and already being offered as standard equipment in some sectors. The majority of EU countries have already begun issuing tachograph cards in preparation for the changeover. However, the EC is concerned a number of member states are behind schedule in establishing the national legislation and the administrative framework required for the compulsory introduction of the digital tachograph.

WHERE TO FIND OUT MORE

- VOSA's digital tachograph guidance *www.digitaltachographg.gov.uk*
- Siemens VDO *www.vdo.com* (includes advice and guidance)

Creditor group to acquire NABI

HUNGARIAN-BASED NABI Autobuszipari Rt (NABI Rt.) is entering into a preliminary agreement with NABI Gyarto es Kereskedelmi Kft and Homerica Investments BV to acquire all the stock of NABI Inc and substantially all of the business and assets of NABI Rt.

The acquisition will be implemented by staged transactions: the first, through the acquisition of US $81.1 million of debt jointly owed by NABI Rt and NABI Inc from NABI's current lenders. These lenders will also receive the net proceeds from the sale of NABI Rt's holding in its idle Kaposvar facility; second, the assumption of that debt by the purchasers and the payment of US $2.0 million in cash in exchange for the acquisition of the stock of NABI Inc and NABI Rt's business and operating assets, together with the assumption of its operating liabilities.

Following the closing of the transactions, NABI Inc will owe its debt to the purchasers and NABI Rt will be debt free.

Voice of London calling

ARRIVA is trailing a 'Voice of the Buses' on its 149 route in central London.

Five vehicles have been fitted with the audio-visual next stop announcement system, called Countdown.

The trial lasts eight weeks during which the suitability of the 'Voice' will be assessed via customer feedback – Emma Hignett, Darlington's Alpha FM radio presenter has been chosen to record the announcements. TfL is hoping the new service will give Londoners a modern icon, partly replacing the lamented Routemaster.

The system takes advantage of the new Siemens-designed iBus technology which pinpoints buses via a combination of satellite tracking and GPRS technology. This allows greater accuracy than the current 'beacon' system which can lose vehicles if they are stuck in traffic, and hence affects the accuracy of bus stop real-time information. IBus will be rolled out across all 90 London bus garages in 2007.

Emma Hignett, the new voice of London?

MCV in expansion

TO HELP support its expansion, MCV Bus and Coach has opened a new Aftersales Department and has appointed an ex-First man to head up the operation.

Grant Crisp joins the company as after sales manager from First Group London where he was responsible for all body maintenance and repair at the First Rainham repair centre. Prior to that he was after sales manager at Marshall Bus.

The new department will provide technical support and spare parts to existing customers, accident repairs on all makes of bus and coach, including integrals, and the increasing refurbishment of both single and double deck buses for London operators contracted to TfL.

"We are delighted that Grant has joined our team, bringing a wealth of knowledge, experience and professionalism with him," says Vernon Edwards, MCV's commercial director.

"As our customer base is increasing both in numbers and geographical spread the time was right to invest in both resources and equipment to deliver the level of after sales that our increasing new customers are expecting from their supplier."

"In addition to the normal after sales actions we are now increasingly supplying our product with a full repair and maintenance package - which can include air conditioning equipment if fitted - at a fixed monthly cost for the duration of the contract."

NEWS IN BRIEF

Euro demands

The International Road Transport Union (IRU) is demanding European governments give the same incentives to road transport operators as those announced by the EU for passenger cars and light commercial vehicles. It says operators need incentives for Euro IV and V vehicles to ensure a positive return on their extra investment for the purchase of such vehicles, especially in today's highly competitive market.

Red buses go green

ALL of London's 8,000 buses have now been fitted with particulate traps under the Mayor of London's £30m Diesel Particulate Filter Programme. Tfl says the traps have captured 375 tonnes of particulates, 2,710 tonnes of CO and 845 tonnes of hydrocarbons since 1999.

Volvo News

WE hear that Volvo will be making an announcement very soon on where they are heading with hybrid technology – the operative words being: very soon. Also, the company will have a new decker out this year – with examples out on test on English roads before the middle of the year.

Tri-axle first for Abbotts

ABBOTTS of Leeming have ordered the first ever tri-axle Volvo B12Bs with Sunsundegui Sideral 2000 bodywork in the UK and Irish market. The firm already operates two-axle Siderals – but has now opted for a third axle for the extra capacity, although it is de-seated from its maximum 61 to 57 seats. The vehicles will be delivered at the end of May and will be used for both UK work and trips across Europe.

Paradise a step closer

LIVERPOOL'S old Central Bus Station and NCP carpark were demolished in a controlled explosion at the weekend – the blast was heard up to 40 miles away. The way is now clear for the rest of the Paradise project to be completed; the transport interchange was opened at the end of last year.

2005 GOOD, 2006 BETTER?

2005 was a bumper year for East Yorkshire Motor Services, and the early signs are that 2006 will be just as good. News editor Andrew Peace reports

EAST Yorkshire Coaches, a subsidiary of the Hull-based coach and bus operator, beat its 10,000 passenger target in 2005 and had it's best-ever day recently with 174 bookings for its 2006 holiday programme.

EYC has also re-signed its contract with championship winning Hull Rugby Football Club to provide vehicles for the adult and U21 team and supporters, averaging out at four vehicles per outing.

The news comes on top of a 27-vehicle order announced recently, totaling £4m, including nine Plaxton coaches, six Primo midibuses, and a further six full size single and six double deckers. The vehicles will be spread over the firm's subsidiaries in Hull, Manchester and Kidderminster.

But while expecting another good year on the coaching side, chairman and chief executive Peter Shipp sounds a note of caution for the coming year.

He told *CBW*, "The early signs are that business will be better than ever this year on the coach side – we had our best-ever day recently with 174 bookings and we are getting good contracts with tour operators, and that is with our brochure coming out later than usual. Passing 10,000 passengers last year wasn't too bad."

"But things may be more difficult on the bus side, we expect it to remain fairly static with further retrenching on the loss-making routes.

"Fuel prices recovered slightly but they are drifting back. The big unknown is the concessionary fares scheme, it depends whether the funding is enough, but that is the same for everybody."

"We have a problem with our final salary pension scheme – we closed it five years ago but it is still causing a lot of grief because it needs top-ups."

"But despite everything we are determined to continue to invest in new vehicles, it pays off in terms of driver morale, passenger comfort and passenger comfort."

● See pages 28-31 for other operators' views on 2005, and their top tips for touring in 2006.

'WE'VE GOT NOTHING TO GO ON' SAYS EYMS BOSS

EYMS chief Peter Shipp has added his voice to local protests about the closure of public toilets in the Scarborough area. His drivers can be away from the depot for up to four hours at a time and the lack of public toilets presents real problems.

Local pubs are often the only option – off limits to bus drivers for obvious reasons. "I realise there is a cost to keeping open these toilets and I know they sometimes cause other problems," he says. "But I believe it is vital that public facilities are available at strategic points and the needs of bus drivers appear to have been ignored in this debate."

● Is a lack of public toilets a problem in your area? Email *andrew.peace@rouncymedia.co.uk*

NATIONWIDE SCHOOLS SHAKE-UP

DRASTIC CUTS to school service subsidies are being proposed all around the country.

Five thousand college and sixth form students in Norfolk – where less than 1% of students live within three miles of schools - could have services cut back in a plan under consideration by the local council. Opponents say the cuts will drastically affect the supply of educated workers in the area and are preparing to make a legal challenge. Norfolk Council is currently struggling with a £24m budget deficit.

In Wrexham, north Wales, there are plans to only allow free travel to under-16 students traveling to their nearest school. Currently 785 pupils in the area travel past their nearest school.

A further five thousands students in North Yorkshire would be affected by a decision to cut free transport for over-16s. The county council says that 95% of LEAs charge for over-16s, and spend an average of £15/week per student. North Yorks spends £34/week.

● Are you facing similar cuts in your area? Email *andrew.peace@rouncymedia.co.uk*

STRIKES ACTION

FIRST Group workers in Glasgow last week voted 15 to 1 in favour of industrial action.

A First bus driver was sacked this month after a passenger complaint – allegedly without accepted procedures being observed. Union reps are normally present during complaints handling, according to the T&G, but in this case it says its rep was not notified. The union says the strike includes all First Glasgow workers, not just the drivers.

● A report by a T&G union official has been published attacking First Group's industrial record. It says that there were 20 UK bus ballots in non-First companies in 2005, only two of which resulted in industrial action. By contrast, First had nine ballots, seven of which resulted in strikes.

● TWM drivers are also threatening industrial action. A mass meeting last week rejected a pay offer, details of which are being kept secret by both sides. 1,600 out of 2,500 drivers reportedly voted against. TWM drivers currently start on £6/ hour, rising to a maximum of £8.73/hour.

DRINK DRIVER JAILED

ROGER BASS, 53, a school bus driver for Regal Busways of Chelmsford, Essex has been jailed for two months following a conviction for drink driving. He was also banned from driving for three years.

He was found to be over the limit when police stopped him on his way to work. Bass, who has a previous drink-drive conviction, told police he had drunk four cans of lager and two brandies the night before.

HE told the court he took full responsibility for his actions and that he did not want to drive again. He was sacked from Regal Busways as soon as the offence came to light.

MERSEYSIDE IN THE MIRE

MERSEYTRAVEL says it is overwhelmed by the amount of changes being made to bus services in the city and that it cannot keep up with the changes to travel information. The PTE has renewed its call for services to be re-regulated.

Over 100 routes will change across Merseyside in the next three months meaning amendments to 2,500 out of 6,000 bus stop timetables, plus timetable booklets, the Merseytravel website and its journey planner. Merseytravel says it cannot keep up and is prioritizing the worst affected areas.

Cllr Mark Dowd, chair of Merseytravel, says, "The general public have my deepest sympathy but of course that offers little consolation when wholesale changes are made by shareholder-led bus companies delivering profit."

Dominant Merseyside operator Arriva says that changes are down to roadworks, the City Centre movement strategy and its policy of continuously developing services. It says it has tried to accommodate the PTE by giving ten, rather than

eight, weeks' notice. It says re-regulation is a matter for the government, but that better services are brought about by partnership.

PLYMOUTH Citybus has signed an agreement with the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association allowing free travel to official puppy walkers. The GDBA describes the scheme as "vitally important" in familiarizing the dogs with the different environments they are likely to encounter later in life. Citybus describe it as an extension to its policy of exceeding requirements for passengers with disabilities.

● TfL announced a similar scheme last month.

T'LINK PR AWARD

TRANSLINK, the Northern Ireland public transport provider, has won a high-profile public relations award for the introduction of its Metro bus service. Ridership on the Greater Belfast network has increased by 10% since Metro's introduction in February 2005 – the first significant change in Belfast's bus system for 30 years.

The Best Public Sector PR Campaign was awarded by the Chartered Institute of Public Relations at a ceremony in London last week.

"People naturally have concerns when familiar systems change," says Translink marketing chief Ciaran Rogan. "Through our PR programme we instigated a two-way communication flow to ensure that we provided key information through a variety of media, but also that we listened to the views of those affected by the changes."

In association with PR consultancy Morrow Communications, Translink generated £167,261 of positive media coverage over the three-week introductory period. 'Opportunities to see' were calculated at nearly 6.5m, equating to over 92% of positive media coverage – surpassing Translink's own target of 60%

TFL CARPETS CENTRA LONDON

CENTRA LONDON has landed itself in trouble with TfL over unreliable bus services. Users are complaining about long waits on two of the company's routes, blamed by TfL on an insufficient fleet. The routes in question were taken over from Mitcham Belle in 2004.

TfL says the company is not performing "anywhere near its targets".

A spokeswoman said: "They are penalised heavily for not meeting these targets. Centra has provided us with a plan which we are now monitoring."

Centra, a subsidiary of Central Parking Systems, had another bus route taken off it by TfL late last year for running an "unsatisfactory service".

The company also runs another four local bus services. Centra is refusing to comment.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Hoodie trouble

LOCAL newspaper reports reveal that seven drivers have resigned from Courtney Coaches in Bracknell in recent months over attacks from 'hooded youths'. The latest, when bricks were thrown at a moving bus on a housing estate, shattering two windows, happened at 1430hrs on a Saturday. Another incident involved a gang of hoodies who boarded bus and hurled eggs at the driver. He resigned shortly afterwards.

ELT update

THE public consultation on TfL's proposed East London Transit scheme – a fully segregated, priority, hybrid-drive busway – finished this week. Initial consultation in 2001 reported 82% of respondents were in favour of the scheme, designed to be upgradeable to a fully-fledged tram line depending on demand. The latest phase relates to five potential routes between Barking and Gallion's Reach in Docklands, although further extensions are planned.

Bristol strife

BRISTOL EAST MP Kerry McCarthy launched an attack on First Group fare rises in the House of Commons last week. She says the rises are stopping passengers using buses in the congestion-hit city. The secretary of state did not condemn First, but agreed it was important that fares were "affordable". The company put fares up three times in 2005, by up to 22% in some cases, but also recently unveiled a fleet of 20 brand new Wrights/ Volvo deckers for the city.

PMT Penalties

FIRST PMT in Stafford are introducing a £35 penalty for fare dodgers in response to a marked rise in forged tickets and 'over-riding'. PMT bosses blame the advent of high-resolution colour printers and scanners. The campaign is being promoted by a poster campaign and backed up with a uniformed team of inspectors.

Bus lane penalty

'OPERATION PANTHER' a campaign to tackle anti-social motorists has been launched by Leicester Police. Drivers who use bus lanes and pedestrian areas and who park in disabled spaces are being targeted. Penalties include £30 fines or having the vehicle towed away.

KINGSCOURT EXPRESS SINKS UNDER CZECH BUREAUCRACY

KINGSCOURT Express, the oldest private carrier in the Czech Republic says it has bowed to bureaucracy and ceased its operations. Its last Prague-London round trip service ran on January 14.

The closure follows a 15 year struggle where Kingscourt Express has battled to remain competitive in a tightly fought market but has finally caved in after a protracted dispute with state business authorities over which services it could legally offer. Company founder and owner Bohumir Nusl was forced to make the painful decision to close the business down. He said: "The pressure on my business has intensified, and I'm not willing to cope with it any more."

Kingscourt came under investigation by the Business Licence Office in Prague two months ago for offering more and different services than were outlined on its business licence. The company had begun expanding its service to include accommodation and trips to other destinations a few years ago to survive in a market where prices are falling in the face of strong competition from large, international coach carriers and low-cost airlines.

"When conditions on the market toughened, I had to offer customers some extra value," Mr Nusl said.

The Business Licence Office said Kingscourt wasn't authorized to provide services other than coach transportation and launched legal proceedings, forcing Mr Nusl to drop the services. The office also threatened to level a hefty, yet unspecified, fine.

The 54-year-old businessman, a former elementary school classmate of Prime Minister Jiri Paroubek, has been living in London since 1982. He decided to shut down operations and has not considered selling the business.

"I didn't want to be bugged by someone else anymore," Mr Nusl explained. "The excessive level of bureaucracy in this country in addition to the rapidly changing legal environment make the business climate here quite unfriendly."

Notice was given to all of Kingscourt's 18 employees and its fleet of five DAF double-decker coaches has been put up for sale.

FIERCE MARKET

LOW cost air fares and budget airlines have provided serious challenges to long-haul coach journeys over the past few years and market analysts believe Kingscourt would have failed to survive despite the extreme difficulties Czech operators face in making changes to their Business Licences – even an address change is difficult to implement.

The company was one of the smallest in the market between Prague and London, and they believe only Eurolines has the capacity and flexibility of route options to remain viable – without changing its service portfolio. Mag Consulting, an agency monitoring the tourism industry, said coach carriers' ability to offer extremely low prices for late bookings creates something of a niche market for them – simultaneously creating a market for the co-existence of both low-cost airlines and coach carriers.

Local carriers, such as Student Agency or Capital Express, have to find a way to offset a drop in international bookings, usually by their domestic travel services.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

IRISH opposition party Fine Gael has published a report calling for the public transport market in **Dublin** to be opened up to competition. It says passenger numbers could jump 50% and the amount of subsidy fall by half too if independent operators were allowed to bid for state contracts... students and police in Quito, the capital of **Ecuador** have clashed over bus fare increases. Hundreds have been injured in the clashes which involved sticks, stones and homemade bombs. The proposed raise had already been withdrawn before the riot started... the Eastern Cape area of **South Africa** is overhauling its public transport system: 300 small operators are due to merge into a single entity with each taking a share. Scania has won the order for 175 new buses. Meanwhile the rest of the country is reeling after a spate of accidents including one which claimed the life of a high-profile member of a national sports body. In total 27 people have been killed in the last month and over a hundred injured. One of the accidents was caused by the drivers girlfriend distracting him by "kissing and fondling him" as the coach sped along at 130kph... a public transport art campaign in Melbourne, **Australia** caused outrage amongst ethnic minorities by warning 'non-Anglo'commuters that they may be "subject to suspicion". The posters, a parody of an anti-fare evasion campaign, were swiftly removed... the **Sri Lanka** Transport Board has ordered 200 longer buses as part of its overhaul of public transport in the capital Colombo, no wonder they didn't want our old sheds... after having experimentally operated a 25metre long trolleybus in April 2004, the City of **Zürich** Transport Authority (VBZ) is now putting a similar three-section articulated vehicle in scheduled service on one of the busiest routes of the system. The bus is on loan from Geneva which has ordered a fleet of these 190-passenger units from Swiss builder Hess & Co. of Solothurn. If all goes well, VBZ could buy 17 similar vehicles. The cost of the test bus is said to be around SFr 1,52 million (ca. £693,000), although production vehicles will be closer to just under SFr.1 million. The high cost is claimed to be amortised over a relatively short period by the bi-articulated design's greater passenger/earnings potential.

Islwyn in black

THE UK'S smallest municipally owned bus company, Islwyn Borough Transport of Blackwood, posted its second loss in the last trading year, but managing director Roger Sims told *CBW* that the company had turned the corner, and was now trading profitably.

The company which operates both buses and a coach company Kingfisher Travel, is now owned by Caerphilly County Borough Council, although it retains the name it used for 30 years prior to Local Government reorganisation in South Wales.

Results for the year ended 31 March 2005, show a gross profit of £656,000, on turnover of £3.964m. This compares with a profit of £248,000 on turnover of £3.903m, the year before. After administrative expenses, interest and other operating income, the loss before tax was nearly £116,000 compared to nearly £258,000 the year before. The company has net assets of £1.228m – up from £739k in 2005.

Managing director Roger Sims explained that the company had borrowed £466k from the Council during the year, as the council had to turn to its shareholders, in the same way that private companies would turn to theirs. At the year end, £545k was owed to the Council, and repayments of capital and interest will be made for the next five years.

Lowfloor or free

TRENT BARTON says it is the first major bus company in the country to go 100% lowfloor. To back up its claim it has told passengers that if the company is forced to run a non-accessible vehicle that they can travel for free.

Melvyn Hopwood, Trent Barton director, says: "The Government set the bus industry a target to have 100% lowfloor buses by the end of 2015. We understand we are the first major bus company to achieve this, and we are backing our promise with a no-nonsense guarantee. If, for any reason, we fail to supply a lowfloor bus, that journey will run for free."

An average of 100,000 people use Trent Barton buses every day.

Metroline shuffle

METROLINE, the London bus subsidiary of Singapore-based transport giant ComforDelGro, has announced a re-organisation of its senior management.

Sean O'Shea, previously acting managing director, has been promoted to chief operating officer. The change takes effect immediately and replaces his previous role. He will continue to report to chief executive officer Jaspal Singh, who commented, "Sean will continue to focus his energies primarily on the operational and commercial aspects of the business. Since May last year, he has demonstrated his ability to ensure that operational excellence at a high level of efficiency and productivity, is achieved and maintained."

Metroline operates 13.5% of the capitals services on 93 routes under contract to TfL in north, west and central London and south Hertfordshire. It carries 250m passengers and covers 37.5m miles each year. Its fleet numbers 1200 vehicles.

● For more People News see page 46.

Cardiff air link under threat

A DIRECT bus link to Cardiff International Airport is facing the axe because a new subsidised rail service has taken away many of its passengers, despite them having to transfer to a bus for the final leg of their journey.

The award-winning X91 Airbus Express, which runs half-hourly from the central bus station to the airport, is now under review by Cardiff Bus and consultations are ongoing with the vale of Glamorgan Council, the airport authorities and the Welsh Government.

The Arriva Trains service, which links Cardiff and Bridgend via Barry, carried around 172,000 passengers to and from stations at Rhoose and Llantwit Major in its first six months of operation. Airport passengers still have to take a connecting bus to complete their journeys, and this is operated with a subsidy by Shamrock Travel.

Cardiff Bus managing director David Brown said that other bus operators had been hit by the introduction of the rail service last June. "The rail service has doubled the public transport provision, but not doubled the patronage" he said. "There has been a substantial transfer of passengers from bus to rail, and we can't continue to operate the current level of service. The rail service is subsidised and is a very attractive option, as the fares are the same as by bus"

One possible option is to link the airport service to the Llantwit Major service, which also operates half-hourly, but this would sever the direct link, and also increase journey times, making the service even less attractive.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Closure hits buses

CORPORATION Street, the main thoroughfare through central Manchester, will be closed to traffic from 29 January. Bus Users UK say the move, which is a trial and can hence be done without consultation, will hit passengers wanting access to the city's most popular shops. Greater Manchester PTE's 30-seater Metroshuffle will still have access, on a 30 minute frequency. North Manchester operator First is most affected.

Gricer in jail

TEENAGE bus spotter Paul Hughes, 19, was jailed for eight months last week for stealing three vehicles. He stole two First buses in Portsmouth on the same day and drove them distances of up to 150 miles. He was finally caught after taking a Stagecoach bus fitted with vehicle tracking – six police cars chased him down the M27 before forcing him to stop.

Kiley confesses

BOB Kiley, the outgoing TfL Transport Commissioner, has revealed the reason behind his early departure. He says there is "something in his genetic make-up" which forces him to leave jobs after five or six years. He remains on the London Mayor's payroll, charging £3,200 per day for up to 90 days consultancy in 2006 and 2007, and 50 days in 2008. He also gets £113,425 in benefits paid each year until 2008, and £745,000 in severance pay. He will continue to live in the 'grace and favour' townhouse in Belgravia.

Taxibus news

THE GMPTE taxibus service, the Barrow Bridge Local Link, is proving a hit with locals and funding has been guaranteed for another year. The door-to-door service, operated by Telecars using XX, started in July 2005, and will now continue until at least January 2007.

Transport bid

THE North-East Interim Regional Transport Board has submitted a bid to government for £437m worth of transport schemes. This includes £33m for infrastructure upgrades on the Tees Valley Bus Network; £16m on improvements to the Hartington interchange for the North Middlesborough Accessibility Improvement Scheme; and £12m for the Darlington Eastern Transport Corridor, to relieve congestion on roads in and around the town.

ESKER TO IMPORT HISPANO COACHES

MARTIN COLE, TECHNICAL EDITOR/ GABRIEL CONWAY, IRELAND CORRESPONDENT

ESKER Bus & Coach is to import Hispano coaches based on VDL chassis to the UK and Ireland.

Kilbeggan-based Esker has confirmed the first two Divo coaches have arrived and will shortly be delivered to customers in Ireland. Another pair are due for delivery soon – one of which will go to another Irish customer and the other will come to the UK to be sold through Esker Bus & Coach (UK). It will also be available as a sales option through Harry Ferguson Sales.

Esker MD Danny Magee said the deal with Hispano was the result of 18 months of negotiations, many visits to the factory and a number of meetings with Spanish operators currently using these vehicles in their own fleets.

"Divo is a very attractive product. What I've seen of the build quality is impressive. Every one of the Spanish customers I've spoken to has been very satisfied with it and I'm sure it will have a lot of appeal in our markets."

Esker has chosen to mount the Divo bodywork on VDL SB4000 coach chassis featuring independent front suspension, a 9.2 litre Euro 3 engine and a ZF six-speed automatic gearbox. In standard form it is equipped with 53 Esteban Ergos reclining seats, plus a courier seat, and will sell for around £165,000. The package is covered by a two-year warranty against faulty parts or workmanship plus an additional three-year guarantee on the structure. The VDL chassis is covered by a standard one-year policy and a second year driveline warranty.

Body

DIVO comes with air conditioning mounted in a roof-top unit and flush fitted, bonded double glazing, which gives it a very modern style. Its steel body frame is given substantial anti-corrosion protection and exterior steel panel are galvanised for longevity. Side flaps and luggage locker doors are made from aluminium – the latter are operated pneumatically. The rear engine hatch is on a parallel lifting system, the front and centre passenger entrances are air operated and the Two roof hatches are incorporated into the polyester roof moulding for additional ventilation and supplementary heating comes from an Eberspacher pre-heater with digital timer.

Soft trim is applied extensively throughout the saloon, covering the roof and side walls. Luggage racks provide additional stowage space and carry integral ducting for individual passenger sets plus loudspeakers for the audio visual entertainment. A gangway carpet is fitted and the flooring material is all anti-slip PVC. Pleated side window curtains are suspended from track systems integrated into the luggage racks.

The audio/PS system features a CD player, amplifier and microphone. Video entertainment is via a DVD system delivered via two 15-inch TFT screens. A 50 litre refrigerator is also supplied

Driveline

THE VDL SB4000 modular chassis is powered by a 228kW DAF PF228C six-cylinder diesel, with an engine brake, coupled with a ZF 6HP592C automatic gearbox with Intarder. Retarder functions are applied automatically through the footpedal or manually via a separate dash-mounted stalk.

It features electronically controlled air suspension and disc brakes all round. A kneeling facility is available at the front axles. Multiplex wiring and a CANbus system cater for all chassis and body systems and power is supplied by two 100Ah alternators and two 200Ah batteries.

Hispano Carrocera

HISPANO coach bodies were previously imported into the UK via EvoBus. The Vita model was available on the Mercedes-Benz O404 chassis but was a short-lived exercise.

Volvo has also made moves to bring in bus-bodies based on the Habit – a European Bus of the Year winner – although none were actually sold. Volvo had one articulated bus built to London specification, ahead of TfL's decision to introduce 'bendybus' operations in the capital. It ran there for some time before losing out to the Citaro. It is currently in use as a demonstrator or on hire. A 12m conventional lowfloor citybus was also built and spent some time as a demonstrator where it was involved in an accident and extensively damaged. Volvo says plans to include the Habit in its future line-up are unlikely to proceed.

Recently, Hispano merged into the Tata automotive group and is supplying technical manufacturing and design technology for the Indian manufacturer's expanding portfolio.

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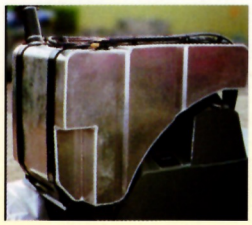

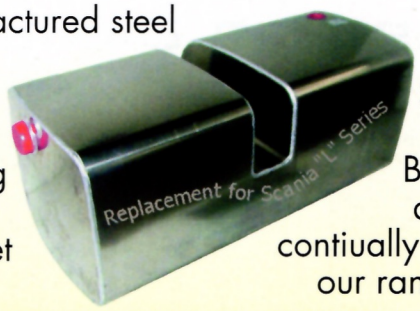

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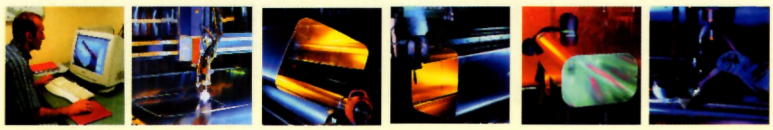

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Held annually, over two days at the NEC Birmingham in March, British Travel Trade Fair is organised by Reed Travel Exhibitions, global leaders in travel trade exhibitions on behalf of VisitBritain in conjunction with VisitScotland, the Wales Tourist Board and Tourism Ireland.

British Travel Trade Fair would like to thank Redwing Coaches for their help and contribution to this years' creative theme.

Brochure launch tops best ever year for Mangans Tours

Donegal operator launches biggest ever tour programme, set to open travel shop

New Volvo gets coveted 5 rating from Failte Ireland*

Gabriel Conway, Ireland correspondent

DONEGAL-BASED coach tour operator Joe Mangan ended 2005 on a string of successes, and is looking forward to an even better 2006 as attendence at the launch of Mangan Tours expanded brochure for the new season was up 40% on last year's event.

300 regular customers joined Joe and his wife Catherine at the second annual Reunion Party and Tour Launch, held this year at the Mount Errigal Hotel in Letterkenny.

"It's great to see so many people here" Joe told *CBW* as the event got under way "we had around 210 at last year's event and we're up around the 300 mark this year, We really didn't know what to expect doing this a second time – there was always the thought that people might have enjoyed the reunion as a one-off last year, but that the numbers would be down this time. We knew it was a great night last time round, and to see so many more people this time is really pleasing"

The event, designed to give customers a chance to meet up with friends they made on the coach tours also sees the unveiling of the tour programme for the new season, with an opportunity for attendees to make a no-obligation provisional booking on the night. "The party gave us a real kick-start to our bookings last year, and so far this evening it looks like the same is happening again – we've had strong interest and a flow of bookings, particularly for our European tours, and we're especially pleased that our new Norway coach and cruise tour is getting a lot of attention." Joe told us.

As well as launching the new tour programme, Mangan's used the party to announce details of another step forward for the company – the forthcoming opening of their first ever travel shop, to be situated in the heart of Letterkenny. "We see this as an extension of the service we ffer to the customer" Joe told us "we've always taken our bookings by phone and fax and we will continue to do that, but now people will be able to call in to see us in Letterkenny, sit down and have a cup of team and a chat, and discuss anything they want to know about the tours"

Mangans are also hoping that the shop will bring in additional business. "70% of our bookings are repeat business, and we've grown a lot by word of mouth, which is great" Joe explained to *CBW* "but there are a lot of people out there who still don't know that it's possible to go on an Irish or European tour directly from Co. Donegal, travelling with local people in a top-quality Donegal-based coach. We had a stand at a travel exhibition locally last year, and were amazed at the amount of people who came up to us, and we're hoping that the new travel shop will bring us a lot more new business as well as making it more convienient for our regular customers"

2005 was a year of solid growth for the west-Donegal operator, which started six years ago with a single tour, and has now grown to include a year-round operation of European, UK and Irish tours, as well as private hire and scheduled service work. The company added it's first ever new fullsize coach to the six-strong fleet during 2005, a Volvo B12B with Van Hool Alizee 53-seat bodywork.

Despite the new coach, the new technology and the forthcoming new travelshop, Joe Mangan is adament that the success of the business in the future depends on staying local and paying close attention to every detail of customer service.

"The most wonderful thing on the tours is the atmosphere, and that's what brings the same people back to book year after year," he says. "It's really great that no matter how far we go away, no matter how many hundreds of miles we travel and borders we cross, we have a coach full of Donegal people, many of whom know each other, or at least come from the same area. It's like a family group, and we feel such a part of it that making sure we get every little thing right for them is the most natural thing in the world.

"We're blessed by our customers – Donegal people really know how to have fun."

Joe and Catherine Mangan (left) and the Mangan Tours staff

EUROTUNNEL ENJOYS MARKED JUMP IN VOLUME

Cross-channel coach traffic on trains up by almost a quarter last year

THE volume of coach traffic on Eurotunnel increased by nearly a quarter in 2005, according to figures recently released by the Channel Tunnel operator. Eurotunnel carried 77,267 coaches in 2005, a 22% increase on the 63,467 vehicles carried on the shuttle service in 2004.

Such a marked increase was helped in the first quarter by the troubles in the port of Calais that disrupted ferry services from Dover.

Eurotunnel benefited from this and appears to have retained a good slice of the extra business for the remainder of the calendar year.

The coach market saw the biggest increase in 2005, with truck traffic recording a 2% rise, while car traffic fell by 3%.

In total, almost 16 million passengers travelled through the Channel Tunnel – 8.2 million of them as shuttle passengers – and the figures are calculated by using an average of 2.52 passengers per car and 38.75 passengers per coach based on surveys.

Total revenue for the year went up to £541 million, an increase of 1% on the previous year, and there was a 4% increase in shuttle revenues – the first since 2002.

It will give some cheer to officials at Eurotunnel who have implemented a new economic model that favours increased operating margins and improved profitability rather than the pursuit of volumes.

That new economic model has also been responsible for a number of job reductions, which has resulted in the number of Eurotunnel staff falling from 3,205 in December 2004 to 2,590 a year later.

BUT NOT SO GOOD FOR DOVER...

WHILE there is cheer at Folkestone, the atmosphere just down the road in Dover has been slightly gloomier as the port recorded a 16% drop in the Continental coach market in 2004.

Figures for the year showed that the number of journeys was down to 107,541, which in turn had a significant impact on the number of passengers who used the port, reducing the overall total by 7% to 13.3 million.

The problems at Calais in the early part of 2005, combined with the strong Euro and the growth of the low-cost airlines, hit the coach market and the number of 'booze cruises' have also fallen.

But it was not all doom and gloom for Dover, who recorded that more than two million lorries traveled through the port, the first time that the figure had been reached.

The growth of 3% would have been far greater but for operational difficulties in Calais early in the year.

For the second year running tourist car traffic showed growth, giving credence to the theory that leisure travellers are rediscovering the benefits of travelling door-to-door by car compared to air travel. The number of journeys was up 2% to nearly 2.6 million.

Bob Goldfield, the port's chief executive, commented: "Overall this is a very satisfactory ferry traffic performance which, combined with efficiencies which continue to be introduced and

Glamour: see the OperaBabes in action at the Cathcart Spring Proms

PROMS FIT FOR A QUEEN

CLASSICAL music, opera and symphonic rock will be on the musical menu at the Cathcart Spring Proms, which will be staged in the Royal Albert Hall on Thursday, May 11. The event will have a special royal dimension this year, as it will celebrate the 80th birthday of The Queen.

Popularly known as the "First Night of the Spring Proms", the annual extravaganza combines music and light shows. It will be presented by Angela Rippon and guest artists will include Duel, violinists who were spotted busking by Pete Waterman, and the OperaBabes, who combine glamour and grand opera.

Tickets cost from £18.50 to £46 and groups from ten to 19 paying customers qualify for a 10% discount, which is increased to 15% for parties of 20 or more. Call the box office on 020 7589 8212 or go to *www.royalalberthall.com*

the performance of our other businesses, will deliver an excellent financial report.

"These traffic figures are in line with forecasts in our masterplan and underpin the need to start planning now for additional facilities and innovative traffic management solutions that will be required to meet the growing demand for ferry services from Dover."

Close-up on reel time tours

TOURS and shorts breaks centred on locations used in films and major television dramas are proving more popular and operators will be able to learn more about such opportunities at one of the seminars at British Travel Trade Fair 2006, which is being held at the Birmingham NEC on Wednesday and Thursday, March 1 and 2.

Martin Evans, of The Tourism Business, will address Film Tourism on the main stage at 2pm on the opening day and will show how destinations and attractions have woken up to the benefits of being used as a location.

Earlier, operators will be able to learn about how our heritage is a key part of the country's tourism in The Future for Britain's Past at 12.30. The talk will aim to show the need to preserve our heritage for future generations

The second day programme will end at 3.45pm with the presentation of the Coach Friendly awards organized by the Confederation of Passenger Transport. These recognize towns and cities in the UK that have demonstrated a commitment to welcoming and encouraging more coach group visits.

In a move to make getting to the fair easier, group travel organizers are being offered free coach travel to the first day of the British Travel Trade Fair at the Birmingham's NEC.

There will be six coaches covering 16 pick-up points on Wednesday March 1 and the initiative will be run by the Confederation of Passenger Transport under its Coach Marque scheme.

British Travel Trade Fair

1-2 March 2006
NEC, Birmingham

The pick-up points will be as follows: Coach 1 - Liverpool, Manchester and Sandbach Services M6; Coach 2 - Leeds, Sheffield, East Midlands (Donnington Services); Coach 3 - Norwich, Cambridge and Peterborough; Coach 4 - Medway Towns, Thurrock Services, South Mimms Service Station; Coach 5 - Central London; and Coach 6 - Cardiff, Bristol, Ross Services. Book free seats on 0845 2267542

● *CBW* is pleased to continue to be one of the official support publications for BTTF and will feature regular news items and previews in the run-up to the show. The event is organised on behalf of VisitBritain by Reed Travel Exhibitions, in conjunction with VisitScotland, the Wales Tourist Board and Tourism Ireland. The official guest of honour is Earl Spencer, the owner of Althorp Hall in Northamptonshire. For more information and a rundown of the full programme of seminars, go to *www.britishtravel-tradefair.com*

Daish's group organiser weekend attracts 135 clients

DAISH'S Travel threw open its doors to welcome 135 representatives who attended the company's first Group Organizers Weekend at the Devonshire Hotel in Torquay.

The weekend, which was held from January 6 to 8, included a mystery tour in one of Daish's own coaches, a gala dinner and entertainment. It was organized by Jon Beare, Daish's Groups Supervisor, who gave a presentation on the Daish's Group, and the guest speaker was Andrew Day from insurance group Towergate Chapman Stevens.

Beare said: "The feedback has been fantastic and a good number of group organizers used the weekend to book their groups for late 2006 and 2007, taking up our offer of having the cost of the weekend credited against their booking."

Daish's plans to make the weekend an annual event and the 2007 gathering will be held at the Sands Hotel in Bournemouth on January 13 and 14.

Daish's Travel owns hotels in Torquay, Newquay, Shanklin and Bournemouth and a fleet of 14 executive coaches. For operator net rates and group package rates, call 0870 902 1412.

Change at the top at Success Tours

PAUL Stratton has announced that he is quitting his role as managing director of Success Tours after eight years in what he describes as a "lifestyle' change. He is stepping down at the end of March and will be succeeded by Steve Hornby, who has been a director of sister company, the Albatross Travel Group, for the last seven years.

Under Stratton's leadership, the Trowbridge based wholesaler has grown sales to more than £2 million and he was instrumental in developing a range of specialist products, including a comprehensive Italian programme.

His decision to move on has been brought about mainly his desire to spend more time with his young family. Stratton said: "I've had a fantastic eight years at Success Tours and I've loved building the company up to its current position. However, I have a young family that I would like to spend more time with and that is very difficult in my current role. I do, though, intend staying involved with Success Tours on a consultancy basis."

Family ties: Paul Stratton

Hornby said: "I have watched Success Tours emerge over the last few years as one of the most respected companies in the industry and I look forward to emulating Paul's passion for the business."

Taking over: Steve Hornby

The future of departures

has arrived

It's all change at Heathrow Airport Central Bus Station

National Express and BAA have invested over £2 million to make Heathrow Central Bus Station (CBS) a much better place to catch a bus or coach and also a much nicer environment to work in.

CBS has been reinvented as an inspired piece of architecture and it looks sensational. For a start it has a roof, a triple-storey inflatable roof designed by top world balloonist Per Lindstrand. 8 million users will find bus and coach travel has suddenly moved into a new era. There are real time on-screen updates of arriving and departing services, automated and staffed ticket machines and information points, along with creature comforts like newspapers, snacks and fresh coffee. National Express is proud to be running the world's most advanced bus and coach station. Because we're not just driving coaches these days we're driving a vision.

The new Heathrow Central Bus Station is now open

I would like to say thank you to all those at National Express, BAA, D5 and Mansells who worked extremely hard to bring this build to fruition.

Marc Sangster, Marketing & Strategy Director, National Express Ltd

National Express

BAA Heathrow

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To... mark.williams@rouncymedia.co.uk

Cc... The Editor, *CBW*, 3 Office Village, Cygnet Park, Hampton, Peterborough, PE7 8FD

You let our profits go for a Burton

From: Name and address withheld

I AM writing to you to express my concern and also my frustration of so-called coach operators in my area.

Over the last week in national newspapers, local newspapers and also on TV you may have seen coverage of our local football team, Burton Albion who were to play Manchester United.

The home match turned out a draw, which meant a replay at Manchester United last Wednesday, January 18.

As soon as the replay date was announced the phones were red-hot with calls for quotes for coaches for the event.

I myself looked at the daily works sheets to see realistically how many coaches I coud do. At most I could do three coaches, as we have, like any other operator, got regular contracts each day to cover. Over the next few days some of our drivers came in to say that other operators had asked them to work Wednesday night, cash in hand.

Obviously, my reply was instantly 'no'. In one way it makes me laugh that operators jump on the bandwagon for one night's work, but at the same time it makes me frustrated that they can't do 5, 10, 20 or 30 coaches on the night in question, without disregard for drivers' hours.

I know a lot of operators on the bandwagon that have got work commitments the following morning (eg, school contracts). When I say morning, I mean starting from 0630hrs onwards.

Now I know from experience, if you go to a match like this you won't be back in time to do any driving work until mid-morning or even dinner time. So if one of my drivers were to go for another operator, then there would be a P45 sealed and posted awaiting them Thursday morning.

Many quotes have come through the grapevine as low as £250 to £400, which a lot of operators agreed to fill the coaches as quickly as possible to get as many vehicles out on the night as possible.

That's all good and well if you think £250 to £400 is worth it, after paying the driver, then the fuel, running costs on top of that and the cost of the driver for the next day's contracts (that's if they're bothering with the law). I don't break the law by having drivers working their hours wrong, so I don't let other companies borrow them so that I end up being in trouble with the Ministry.

If all the operators in the area took the jobs they could actually legally do on Wednesday we would all get better prices for doing the same job. Cash offers to drivers to cover Wednesday night is an insult to us all.

> 'Thanks to the coach operators for demeaning the coach industry...'

Then operators wonder why they can't get drivers and why there are more and more drivers' hours regulations coming out.

These same operators will be whinging about drivers, regulations and prices. And will be the first to moan if and when the ministry turn up to check things over. I'll welcome them to our premises any day because I'm not the one having to throw tachos away because of the 12 coaches they've had, and they're paying drivers cash in hand so that they will come in after a few hours of sleep.

I hope at the end of Thursday they will have made enough money to cover the cost should they be caught for breaking drivers' hours regulations.

Congratulations to Burton Albion, and thanks to the coach operators for demeaning the coach industry with your cowboy tactics and shoddy approach to running a coach firm.

And by the way, my drivers who worked on Wednesday night got Thursday off and one of my coaches has earned as much as two of yours. This in turn keeps a low turnaround in staff and a great loyalty in return.

I wouldn't ask my employees to do something I wouldn't.

An angry reader criticises coach operators in Burton on Trent for their attitude towrds transporting fans to Old Trafford last week

NO CLAIM, NO GAIN

Bad debt can cost your business. If you need to turn over £5,000 for every £500 profit, it's worth pursuing every penny. Here's how...

JANE LEES, CHERYL O'BRIEN, CBW CORRESPONDENTS

WE ALL know the irritation of having paid for something and not received it, or supplied something and not been paid for it.

Coach hirers who don't pay their bills might 'only' owe £150. That set of wheeltrims you paid for but didn't get might seem lost cash after the umpteenth phone call. But there is a way to pursue these debts through court at minimal cost.

It's a common misconception that Small Claims procedure is only available for the private individual, but this is not the case. Companies have access to the system in the same way as everyone else, and as long as the total value of the goods or bill is less than £5,000, it's well worth the effort.

At *CBW*, we've lost count of the number of times we've been asked how to recover fairly minor debts (if you consider £2,000 minor) and suggested the Small Claims procedure. Many operators seem to baulk at the idea of involving court, but the whole point of Small Claims is that it is a less formal way of getting access to law – no part of the procedure is complicated, you don't need a solicitor, and you can even issue your claim on-line.

It's not even a problem if you're still seething about payment for a bill from two years ago. In fact, you have up to six years to make your claim. So get it out of your system now, using our simple guide...

YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED

THE purpose of the small claims court is to deal with disputes including unpaid debts that cannot be resolved by other means.

You must make sure that you have given sufficient warning to your customer that if payment is not received you will take legal action through the Courts. You should have taken all reasonable steps to address all your customer's queries prior to issuing a claim.

You have six years from the date your debt was incurred to issue proceedings. When a Claim form is issued by a County Court, if it is defended/disputed, it is allocated to a "track". There are three tracks within the Court systems: Small Claims, Fast track and Multi track. The standard division between the tracks is based upon the value of the claim. Small claims are those not exceeding £5,000.

As well as going to your local court to issue a claim you can now also issue proceedings on line at http://www.moneyclaim.gov.uk/csmco2/index.jsp, through the court website. This involves inputting the information about the money owed to you and, once you've paid on line, the claim form is issued automatically.

'The purpose of this is to encourage you to deal with the matter yourself'

Although it may seem to be cheaper to have three small claims, as opposed to one large one, this may not actually be the case.

You have to pay a Court fee for each issue and, while in small claims, neither you nor your opponent can recover incurred legal costs.

That aside, if you do have a claim for less than £5,000, the Court procedure is more straightforward than with the other tracks. The purpose of this is to encourage you to deal with the matter yourself, without having to instruct a solicitor. If you do decide to instruct a solicitor, you cannot seek to recover their costs from your opponent if you make a successful claim.

'If your claim is successful in its entirety the judge would usually award a judgement in your favour'

When the claim is issued against your customer, he has now become a Defendant in the legal action, and he is provided with documents which give him the option of disputing all or part of the debt, making a payment offer, or making a counterclaim against you.

If the debt is disputed, the Court then allocates the claim to its appropriate track. In the small claims track, both parties have to file a document called an Allocation Questionnaire. This is quite simply a questionnaire in which you state how you require the Court to deal with the claim. For example if you require the claim to be heard in a particular Court, you state why. You provide details of any witnesses you may wish to bring to Court with you.

Once these forms have been completed the Court will list directions to both parties and list the matter for a hearing.

Your first step will be to list all documents you intend to rely on to prove your case. For example if you have a written agreement or contract with the other party you would list this, plus copy invoices you may have raised, copies of any correspondence or returned cheques etc. The Defendant would also do the same.

The purpose of this is to ensure that both parties know what the other side is planning to produce at court and, in theory, prevents any nasty surprises. You then exchange documents with the other party.

You also make a statement containing the facts of the case as you see them, and any other witnesses you intend to call would do the same. You then exchange these with the other side.

This is all done prior to the Hearing, which itself is quite informal. Forget Kavanagh QC! At the hearing you and the other party, and any witnesses will sit in a room with a Judge. He or she will ask you to explain your claim and the Defendant will be given an opportunity to put his side of the argument. Once the witnesses have given evidence, the Judge will then consider all the facts, perhaps ask a few questions and then make a decision as to the outcome of the proceedings.

If your claim is successful in its entirety the Judge would usually award a Judgment in your favour, for the amount of your debt, together with interest, if claimed, and the amount of the Court fee. The Defendant would usually be given 14 days in which to make payment, failing which you can then pursue enforcement.

FACT FILE

- Find a solicitor through The Law Society - *www.lawsociety.org.uk/home.law*
- If bad debt's worrying you, contact: *www.insolvencyhelpline.co.uk* for free advice.
- Other useful contacts are: *www.sbs.gov.uk* and *www.payontime.co.uk*

Jayne Lees is manager of the Debt Recovery Unit at Leamington Spa based Solicitors, Wright Hassall

Cheryl O'Brien, is Group Credit Manager at tax consultancy, Chiltern plc

FIRM LET OFF AFTER MISSING HAMMER GAFFE

Traffic commissioner satisfied with new company's speedy response

ALLY MUNRO, CBW CORRESPONDENT

A NEW Highland bus firm has been given a rap on the knuckles by the Traffic Commissioner for failing to have an emergency exit hammer on one of its coaches.

WHAT THE VEHICLE INSPECTOR SAID:

AN inspection was carried out at the base of ScotBus Ltd, at Station Yard in Tore, Ross-shire, on 11 July last year.

VOSA Inspector Michael Howden told a Public Inquiry held at Inverness Town Hall that he found the hammer defect on one vehicle, registration RIL 3691.

He said there was no emergency exit hammer, as required if there was a need to break windows to escape.

He also discovered the defect had actually been logged in the firm's safety inspection records, but had not been dealt with.

WHAT THE OPERATOR SAID:

SCOTBUS director Neil Macdonald admitted the breach, but claimed he had been let down by a former partner, Russell Henderson, who had responsibility over maintenance.

He told the inquiry that he and Mr Henderson had set up the business in April 2005 after they were both made redundant by Rapsons.

Mr Macdonald took responsibility of recruitment, clerical work, contracts and looking after the drivers.

Meanwhile, Mr Henderson had responsibility for the maintenance side of the business.

However, Mr Macdonald said: "After four to eight weeks the reliability of the vehicles seemed to be going downhill.

"By the end of May my relationship with Mr Henderson was going downhill as well. We discussed it and I decided to buy him out. By June 30 I bought him out."

At that time ScotBus had five vehicles, including the defective bus, on duty at the G8 Summit.

The bus with the missing hammer returned to base on July 9, and Mr Macdonald said his mechanic had not had a chance to look at the paperwork and check the vehicle prior to Mr Howden's visit two days later.

He added that the bus was not due to be sent out on another job until it had been check by his mechanic.

Mr Macdonald said he was let down by his former partner, adding: "I believed Russell Henderson was committed to this. I found it hard to believe our work had gone so wrong."

Since the inspection, he said improvements had been put in place to ensure no such oversight ever took place again.

He explained there was a full-time mechanic he trusts, and a part-time mechanic who can be called in for holiday cover or if the workload increases.

He added: "I have a close working relationship with my mechanic and we talk daily.

"Each week we go through the inspection records and we talk about repairs that have been done and repairs that need to be done."

The company currently operates three school contracts on the Black Isle, Ross-shire, a regular service to Lochewe and provides private hires.

WHAT THE TRAFFIC COMMISSIONER SAID:

TRAFFIC commissioner Joan Aitken said the lack of an emergency exit hammer on the vehicle was very serious.

She issued a formal warning for the breach and told Mr Macdonald: "This public inquiry has served its purpose as it has identified very early on in your operation that there has been a problem.

"It appears you have responded very quickly and co-operated over the difficulties pointed out.

"It comes out you have a real commitment to the business. I think I can have confidence in you and wish you well in your endeavours.

"I am very keen that all operators who operate a registered service have their maintenance tip top. The risk is you have people waiting at bus stops for buses that don't come along."

Joan Aitken: "I wish you well"

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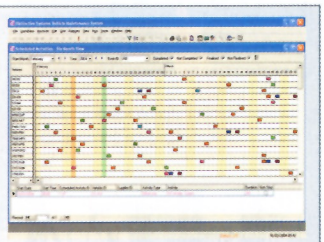

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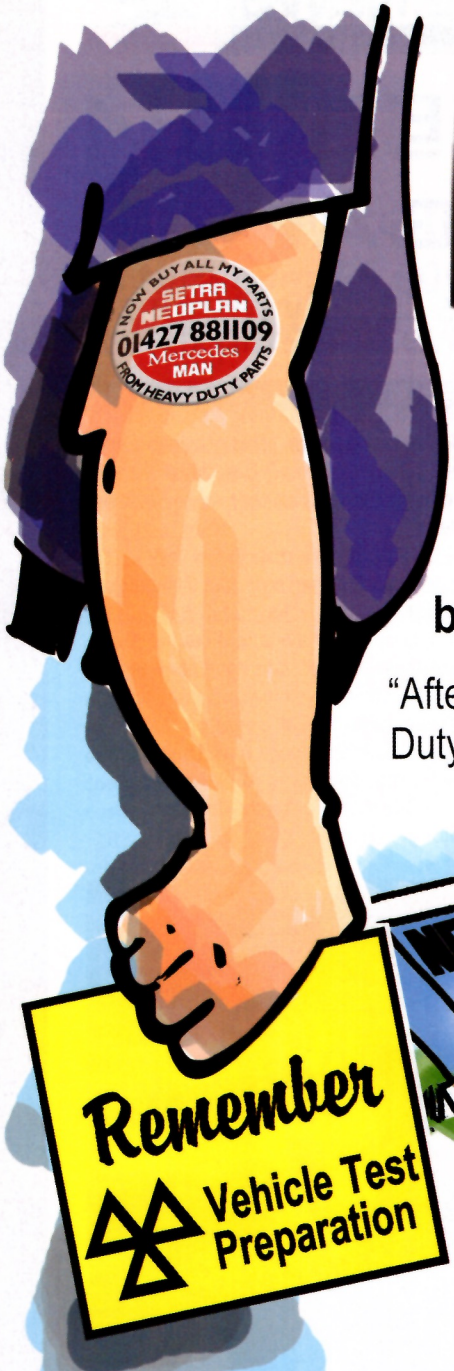

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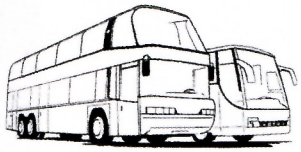

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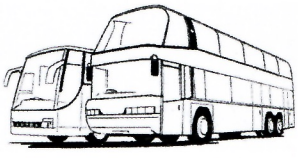


The Genuine Alternative

Ice work if you can get it

Spanish 4x4 impresses in Iceland

SPANISH bodybuilder UNVI has delivered its first specially developed CIMO II for operation in the challenging terrain of Iceland.

Based on a Mercedes-Benz Atego 1328 chassis with four-wheel drive to maximise traction, the CIMO II's body was adapted to suit the requirements but also carefully crafted to follow the legal requirements of the 2001/85 EC Directive. The finished article comfortably seats 37 passengers and offers useful underfloor luggage room of 6.8 cubic metres. An impressive characteristic is a lift-up body to gain even more ground clearance for body panels when operating in soft snow while travelling across the glaciers or fording streams and shallow unbridged rivers.

It is equipped with an enlarged 450 litre fuel tank so there is more than enough fuel provision to supply heating and on-board services in the event of the vehicle becoming stranded. The saloon is trimmed to provide all the comfort passengers would expect from any modern luxury coach - with niceties such as a 50 litre fridge, dark tinted double glazed windows, three-point lap and diagonal seat belts, Esteban Ergos seating and Blaupunkt audio and video system with DVD player and two 15 inch LCD monitors.

The coach will provide coach services in Reykjavik in addition to collecting tourists from hotels and trekking into the scenic interior to explore the highlands and glaciers. Trips could last for anything up to several days depending on the itinerary.

The on-board space is sufficient for carrying most of the luggage required in addition to food and tents.

The vehicle offers a more civilised way of experience the rugged nature of Iceland – travelling along gravel roads, lava fields, sands, crossing unbridged rivers, snow covered roads and mountain tracks between the glaciers.

Conversion of the body necessitated special attention to thermal insulation but also required UNVI to examine new, effective methods of sound proofing the CIMO II to reduce the engine noise in the saloon and eliminate as many rattles and squeaks as possible.

The quality and sturdiness of the CIMO II Islandic Edition, combined with the innovative solutions offered by UNVI to adapt the coach to the terrain, have made a significant impact on Icelandic operators. The vehicle was recently the subject of a one day presentation in Reykjavik – where a number of them expressed an interest.

Ben Colson

"An industry increasingly forced to put the needs of its customers and staff below that of its regulators is an industry with no future"

Gordon Brown started the year saying he was waging a war on Red Tape. But seemingly behind his back, government departments continue to churn out their endless reams of White Paper.

The public transport industry could be forgiven for thinking much of this is aimed at them. Ben Colson – managing director of bus operator Norfolk Green – has felt the pinch of endless regulations and he wants to do something about it. He decided to examine every new piece of legislation imposed on the bus industry in the last five years – 37 individual pieces, or one every six weeks he says - and work out how much it actually costs the industry. Here he explains his findings in his own words...

PHEW, we've got 2005 behind us, at last. A year that started with a blast against the Traffic Commissioners, (*CBW* 662 January 20, Open Platform) and finished with more doom and gloom. The Bus Industry Monitor headlined "bus industry profits fall again as labour cost inflation bites"; ATCO published its 2005 "Price, Expenditure and Competition Survey" and yet more independent operators decided to quit the business.

So the bus industry enters 2006 with reasons to be more downbeat than was the case last year. ATCO reckons 33% of authorities will have cut bus services to meet budget by the end of 2006. In many areas there are likely to be more cuts ahead as well, as they face the consequences of the ill-thought-through changes to the Concessionary Fare arrangements that start in England in April.

Towards the end of last year, CPT Director General, Brian Nimick, called for a moritorium on new legislation and regulation, which drew the official Department for Transport response that (a) they only legislate for safety and (b) operators are looking forward to the changes to Concessionary Fares in April, bringing with it the chance to carry more passengers.

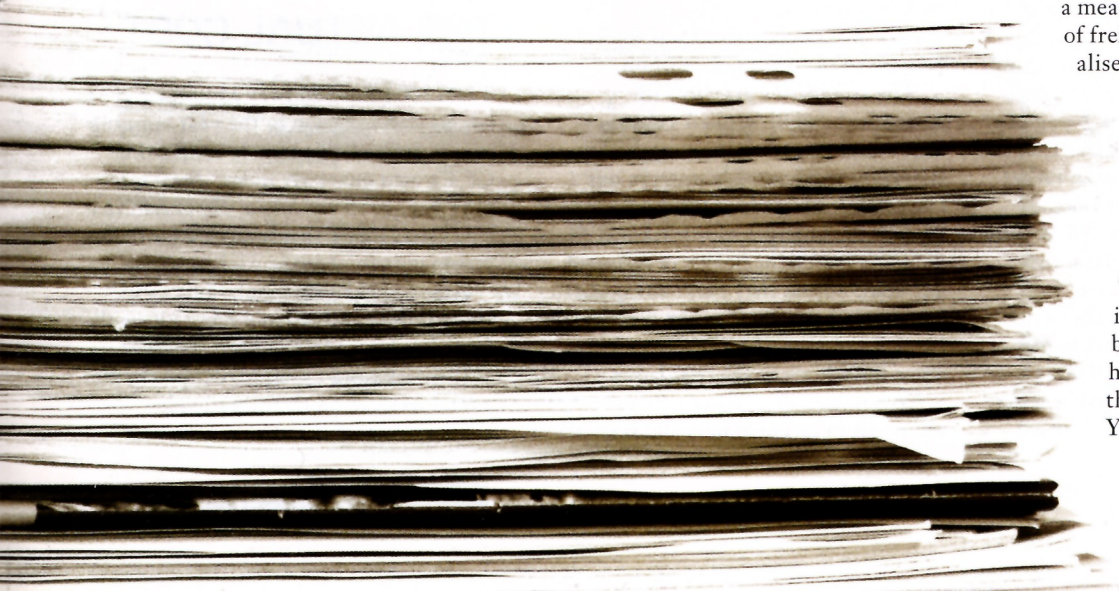
By linking the two, DfT implied that income from the extra passengers we will carry is designed to offset the cost of greater regulation. But that is patently not the case. The overriding mantra is that we should be "no better nor no worse off" than before the introduction of the Concessionary Fares scheme , so it matters not a jot to us how many extra senior citizens we carry - as long as we are properly recompensed for doing so, and they are not crowding adult full fare payers off our buses and back into their cars.

The notion that Government - and I widen it here away from just the Department for Transport as it is every arm of government that impacts us - only regulates for safety is pure hogwash. Indeed the analysis of the 37 new regulations that I have identified that were introduced in the past three years (or are on countdown for implementation in the next two), shows that:

- One new regulation hits us on average every 6 or 7 weeks
- Of the 37, only 16 could even by a wide definition be deemed safety related, most do not even pretend to be so
- We are being hit by a combination of a constant stream of EU regulations impacting (and sometimes countering) the constant stream of UK-originating regulations which mainly impact on employment law
- This does not include any new or changed requirements of the Traffic Commissioner, or as a result of case law in employment cases.

Many of the bus industry's problems with all of this stems from the fact that it is caught at the margin of a wholly arbitrary and irrational split between bus routes that are over and under 50 kms in length. This limit has never been altered since the Common Market, as it then was, introduced it about half a century ago. At the time it was a means of tipping the balance of the cost of freight transport in favour of its nationalised railway industry and against private road hauliers.

As an economic tool of arbitrarily putting up the cost of freight transport it may have been fine - but to apply it now as a health and safety feature is meaningless, and we are forced to live with the result. The EU has never researched the impact on health and safety of driving bus journeys of (say) 35 miles before having turn-round dwell time, rather than driving 25 mile length journeys. Yet the growing disparity between the



37 regulations: all yours

- Age Discrimination Act, 2006
- Asylum and Immigration Act, 2004
- Compulsory use of seatbelts where fitted, 2003
- Control of Asbestos at Work regulations, 2004
- Criminal Records Bureau driver checks, 2004
- Digital Tachograph Regulations, 2006
- Disability Discrimination Act
- Disability Dsicrimination (further provisions) 2004
- Disability Dsicrimination Act 2005
- Dispute Resolution Rules, 2004
- DSA Fees annual increase, 2005
- DSA Minimum Test Vehicle standard, 2003
- Employment Act, 2002
- Employment Equality Regulations
- Employment Tribunals Awards Limits (raised) 2005
- End of Vehicle Life Directive
- EU Drivers Hours Regulations 2006
- EU Training Directive, 2008
- Euro 1, 2, 3 and 4 Emmissions, 2002 to 2007
- Fire Safety regulations, 2005
- HSE Level Crossing Risk Assessments
- Information and Consultation of Employees Regulations, 2004
- National Insurance - increase in employers contribution, 2003
- National Minimum Wage 1999 (but increased
- 31% since then compared to RPI/CPI 7.5%
- No fault compensation
- Noise at Work regulations, 2004
- Operator Licencing, change to Financial Standing requirement, 2005
- Road Transport Directive, 2005
- Stress at Work regulations
- Tachograph rules changes
- Trade Plate Enforcement
- Vibrations at Work Regulations, 2005
- VOSA fees increases 2005 - bus service registrations 13.3%
- O Licence continuation fee 12.6%
- Disc Fee 10.2%
- Weekly Rest Periods, changes to, 2006
- Working Time Directive 2003

What the Government said

In response to Brian Nimick's call for a moratorium on new legislation and regulation swamping the bus industry, the DfT issued the following statement:
"We make every effort to keep regulation to a minimum and only regulate where necessary including for safety, accessibility and customer protection purposes.
"Regulation is introduced following consultation and recent regulations to allow bus lane enforcement and free concessionary fares which will boost patronage have been welcomed by the industry."

way we have to treat the two - in the falsely claimed name of health and safety - is tipping the economics of bus operation further and further into the abyss.

When questioned, EU officials have in the past become irate and irrational, claiming that it did not need researching anyway, it was obvious. Add to that the fact that the lead UK government negotatior did not actually realise that local bus services would be caught in the changes being negotiated back in 2004 - and which are now being progressively introduced - and it is clear that the industry is being positively let down rather than supported by the UK government.

(Incidentally, he did not know, but he also very clearly indicated that he did not care that he did not know.)

This is not to suggest that the above list is exhaustive. For example, *CBW's* Legal Eagle has identified (January 19 2006) a further change to - and widening of - maternity and paternity leave due to start in October. And, because of other legal changes impacting upon us - for example coming from the Traffic Commissioners or Employment Tribunals (or appeals) - the impact is a change to the way we are supposed to operate and manage our businesses. And they are coming at six weekly intervals.

How absolutely right it was for Brian Nimick to call for a moratorium.

The stream of - arguably ill-researched and ill-applied - changes is now almost at the point at which it is becoming impossible to serve our customers' interests. This is what makes most of the changes so infuriating. Most do not enhance the health or safety of our staff, nor do they make things better for our customers - they are distractions from running the business in order to serve the whims of the regulators.

An industry increasingly forced to put the needs of its customers and staff below that of its regulators is an industry with no future.

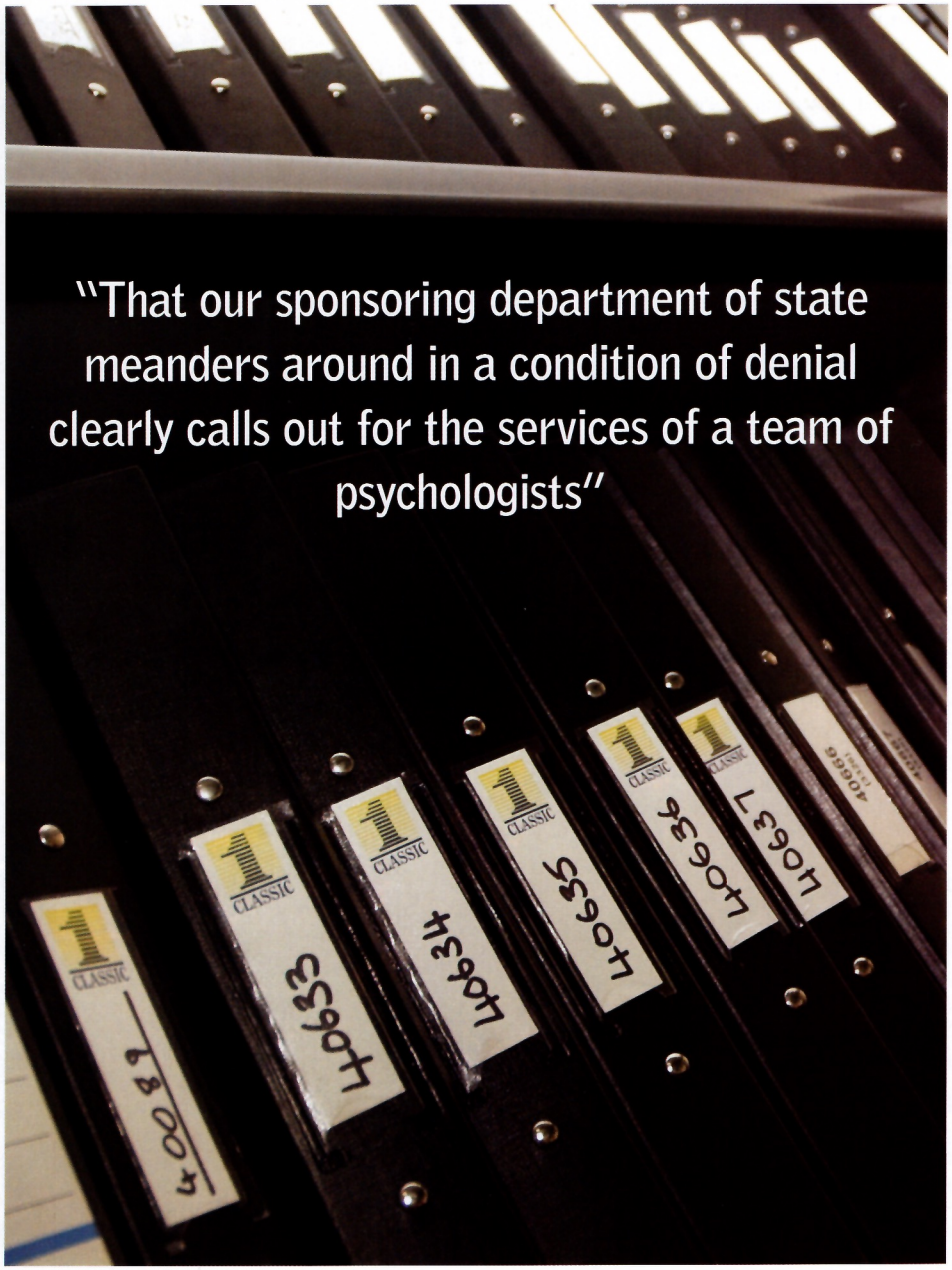
That our sponsoring department of state meanders around in a condition of denial clearly calls out for the services of a team of psychologists.

THE ACTUAL COST

THE 2004 Bus Industry Monitor reports labour cost inflation in the year running at just short of 8%, largely supporting CPT's own quarterly index. Staff rates per hour are increasing at about half that level, suggesting that some 4% is attributable to regulatory impacts.

Many of the new regulations - especially those coming from EU - hit small firms harder, and the administrative burden is bound to fall harder on smaller operators than on the mightly plcs.

In trying to put a price on the cost


"That our sponsoring department of state meanders around in a condition of denial clearly calls out for the services of a team of psychologists"

of regulation I have therefore started by working with a medium sized operator and identifying the cost to that company, and added a 15% per unit for smaller operators. But I have subtracted 20% in respect of the big five because I know that the impact on a smaller business such as mine is about one third more than on a large operator.

The UK bus park has 46,300 buses. Using the above relationship between large, medium and small-sized operators - and splitting out one-off set-up costs required to meet the new regulations from the ongoing annual costs - indicates that typically the cost to the industry, across the five years studied, is £30.9m per annum.

WHAT NEXT?

WE have to challenge the Department for Transport to tell us why it supports extra expenditure to this extent, when it fails to ensure bus service support funding to local authorities recognises these costs. Thereby it is both the author of much of the extraordinary cost increase we are witnessing, and the bus service cuts ATCO claims will devastate services this year.

We also have to redouble our efforts to get some of the more excessive regulations paired back. The Driver Training Directive is one of the most preposterous pieces of regulation ever to come from EU. It takes away the competitive advantage gained by those operators who recognise the value of training and investing in its staff accordingly.

It is as if it is part of EU's real agenda is to reduce the competitveness of the zone.

Furthermore, it has wrapped the regulations up in really extraordinarily detail as to how it has to be implemented by member states - have you noticed how DG 7 - EU's Transport Directorate - has its own selective 'opt out' from subsidiarity?! It makes it almost impossible for a small operator to actually implement the Directive anyway.

What utter stupidity, how typically EU, yet how typically Derpartment for Transport to shrug its shoulders and say it only regulates for safety, and how much we are all looking forward to carrying more pensioners in April.

How he worked it out

How many buses are there?

	PLC	35,900	
	Intermediates	9,400	
	Small Operators	1,000	(figures supplied by the CPT)

Cost Basis used			£
PLC	one-off costs	£618 x 35,900	22,186,200
	on-going cost	£470 x 35,900	16,873,000
Intermediates	one-off costs	£950 x 9,400	8,930,000
	on-going cost	£720 x 9,400	6,768,000
Small Operators	one-off costs	£1093 x 1,000	1,093,000
	on-going cost	£828 x 1,000	828,000

Therefore One-off cost across 5 yrs 2003-2007= £32,209,200 = £6,440,000 per year
On-going annual costs= £24,469,000
Annual cost to the industry = £30.9 m per year

How much is it costing us?

There are about 42,000 buses in the UK and the costs of legislation vary depending on the size of the company. So, according to Colson's calculations (explained left) the total cost of bus industry regulation is broadly £30.9m a year

A visit to Guernsey is on the cards for Hodges Coaches this summer

Going places

How's the season going to go? *CBW* asks operators how last year's market has set the pace for the coming summer season

OPERATORS are predicting a good tourism season within weeks of the first brochures reaching customers.

A *CBW* poll suggests business confidence for both tours and excursions is high on the whole, after a 2005 which started badly but finished, for many operators, well ahead of budget.

Even before the London bombings in July – which hit the incoming market – there was a pattern of tours travelling under capacity and of cautious booking. But according to many operators *CBW* spoke to, the recovery from midsummer onwards addressed the shortfall in turnover.

For just under half of the survey sample, even profit margin increased slightly, though the remainder reported the same margin or lower. The season was sufficient to convince many to increase the number of tour departures, though there were signs that the traditional excursion market showed signs of fatigue as low-cost airlines bit into the city break market in particular.

The majority of operators have pegged price rises at around the 3% to 4% rate of inflation, but a significant number have reacted to concerns about the choice of locations and attractions becoming stale, and have introduced a larger proportion of new products for 2006.

Almost all operators reported that running costs – especially insurance, fuel and wages – have risen much faster than the Government's inflation figures, and dented margin in 2005. But business confidence is driving a move to address this with more consistent messages about the quality of service, and increase prices to cover additional costs.

TEN TOP TIPS

- Address 'nuts and bolts' costs before attacking the core product
- Innovative product has fewer competitors, and can sustain higher margins
- If people want flight-based travel, find ways to provide it
- Market the 'care' element of tours as heavily as destination
- Consider splitting brochures to address separate age markets
- Get on the internet – web holiday bookings are growing massively
- Sell the best aspects of your tours, and never highlight the downside
- Customers are making last-late decisions about travel – get new product on sale quickly with reduced lead times to match
- The market wants more, shorter holidays; try to add more departures
- Never be afraid to 'steal' the best ideas

Norman Fryer-Saxby, commercial manager, Gold Line Tours, Reading

'At the start of the year we failed disastrously to achieve our targets but by late spring, the market had really picked up. We have a reliance on the excursions market into London to generate turnover, and this generally improved towards the end of 2005.

'This year we have planned 400 excursion departures. We already have some October theatre breaks fully booked.

'We've put 14 new holidays into the brochure this year – a couple more than we did last year – and increased the length of our tours into Brugges.'

Mark Hodge, Hodges Coaches, Sandhurst

'We had a really good 2005, 26% up on the head count, though margins are still tight. But the 2006 brochure includes plenty of new product including a Polish Explorer, Italian Lakes, Picardy Slow Coast rail break, Copenhagen, Guernsey and new Ireland tours. Steam train tours have been particularly popular.'

Roger Mott, MD Motts Travel, Aylesbury

'We had a good tour season, with margin up. Load factor was probably the key driver of this improvement. Our tie-up with Crusader of Clacton leaves us to concentrate on the shorter breaks, with Crusader handling the longer tours for us.

'Once again, late booking was a problem. We found ourselves with half the seats sold just weeks before departure and then having to find the confidence to bite the bullet and hold on, but the sales did eventually come.

'There's a fair bit of new product in both Crusader and Motts offering this year. Possibly the most extreme example is a flight-based New Zealand break running in early 2007. It's a £3,500 holiday, but we've already sold a few.'

East Midlands operator (who wished to remain anonymous)

'Our big change this year is an attempt to break into new markets with tours that appeal to a younger age group. We know it's a medium-term project which requires some patience.

It's not been a great season for the eight- to ten-day European breaks – it's a market which appears to be stagnating. Oddly, we've seen later booking for our longer tours and early booking for many excursions. A significant number of tour bookings are coming the seven- to twelve-week lead time.

'Overall, the head count on our tours was down, but thanks to some aggressive pricing, profit in 2005 was up.'

Jeanette Flanagan, John Flanagan Coach Travel, Warrington

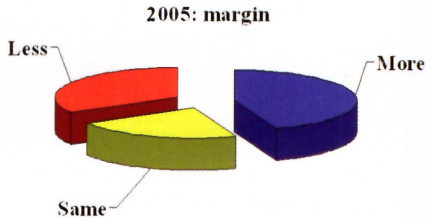
'We had none of our own tours travelling last year after a problematic 2004 for bookings. But for 2006 we have reintroduced our own tours to see if confidence has returned.

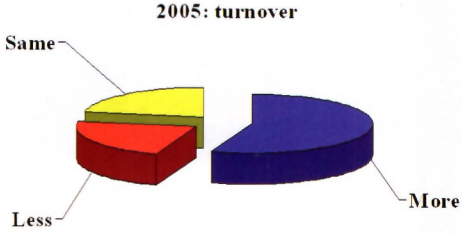
'We have a specialised market with the disabled, and finding accommodation with five or more adapted rooms and proper access restricts the product we can offer. However, we've put on tours to Ireland, the Netherlands and Scotland this year and it does look as if bookings are coming back.'

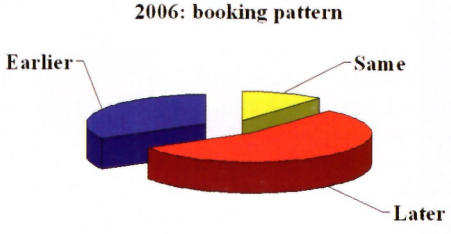
John Weaver, Dawlish Coaches, Devon

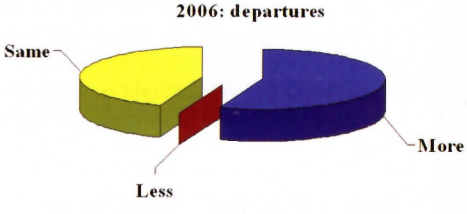
'Fuel costs really hit us last year, but the price of oil is thankfully down again. Our costs rose £5,000, and it was crippling.

'This season is looking good, though, with 25% of our work with other tour operators secured. Everything's looking very buoyant. The full story of last year was of the legislation that hit everyone, including the digital tachograph saga, driver training and latterly the threat of disability access rules being brought into the tour market.'



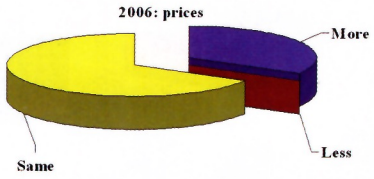


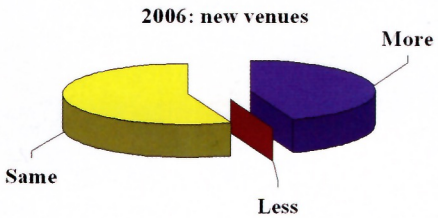


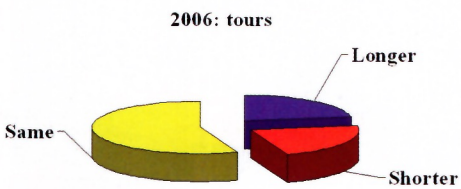


Mark Hunt, director, Taw and Torridge Coaches, Devon

'We have just a small number of departures on our own tour business, but although Easter bookings are down, the season is looking good overall.







'One of the main downturns we've seen is in the excursion market. We've had to knock the Eden Project on the head altogether – I think it's become too expensive, and until there's more development at the attraction, people feel they're seeing the same thing again.

'At one time, we had eight or nine coaches a day running there, but now we get 30 people a day.'

Bill Whyte, director, Whytes Coach Tours, Aberdeen

'Our market is chiefly with short breaks, which are dependent on events in major cities especially Glasgow and Edinburgh. In our location, we have a limited catchment of customers, so whatever we do has to appeal to the same people again and again.

'We've been working hard on our programme for this year. We have 14 new tours – three out of four have changed to give our customers something different. I've every confidence there will be a coach touring market for a long time.

'As with many operators, our biggest problem this year has been legislation – the announcement that Spain has begun fining operators without digital tachographs is very alarming indeed.'

Paul Sawbridge, director, Alfa Travel, Chorley, Lancs

'We monitor bookings very carefully and have noticed that there's a noticeable if slight reduction in the average length of tours booked – down from just over seven days to just over six days in the last ten years.

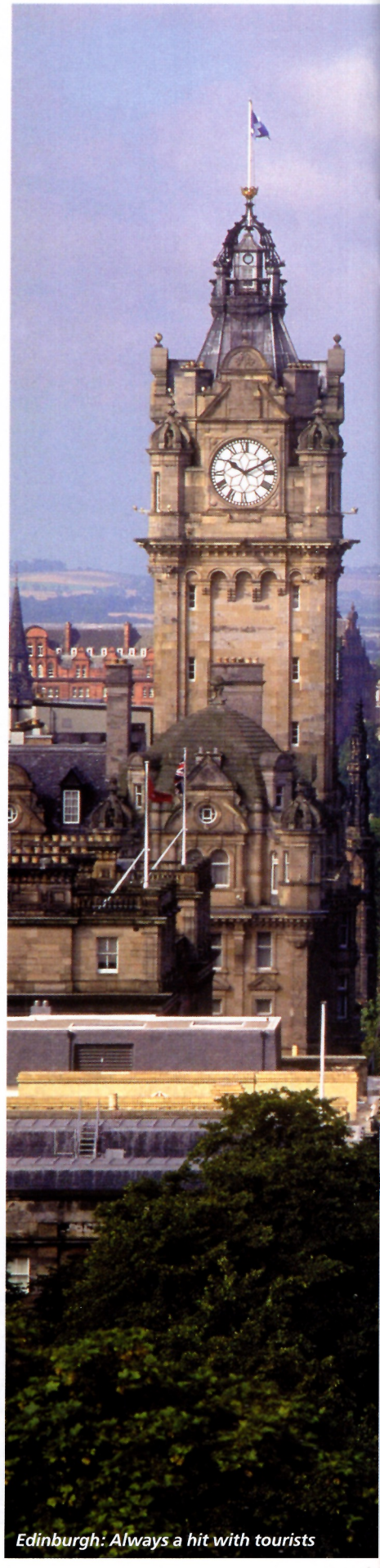
'Like many operators, we found the first five months of 2005 very difficult, but I believe was a 'freak.' I'm confident we'll have a significant growth in 2006 due in part to the Wallace Arnold/ Shearing merger, which has meant fewer seats for them to sell, and a number of its traditional customers looking around for alternative operators.

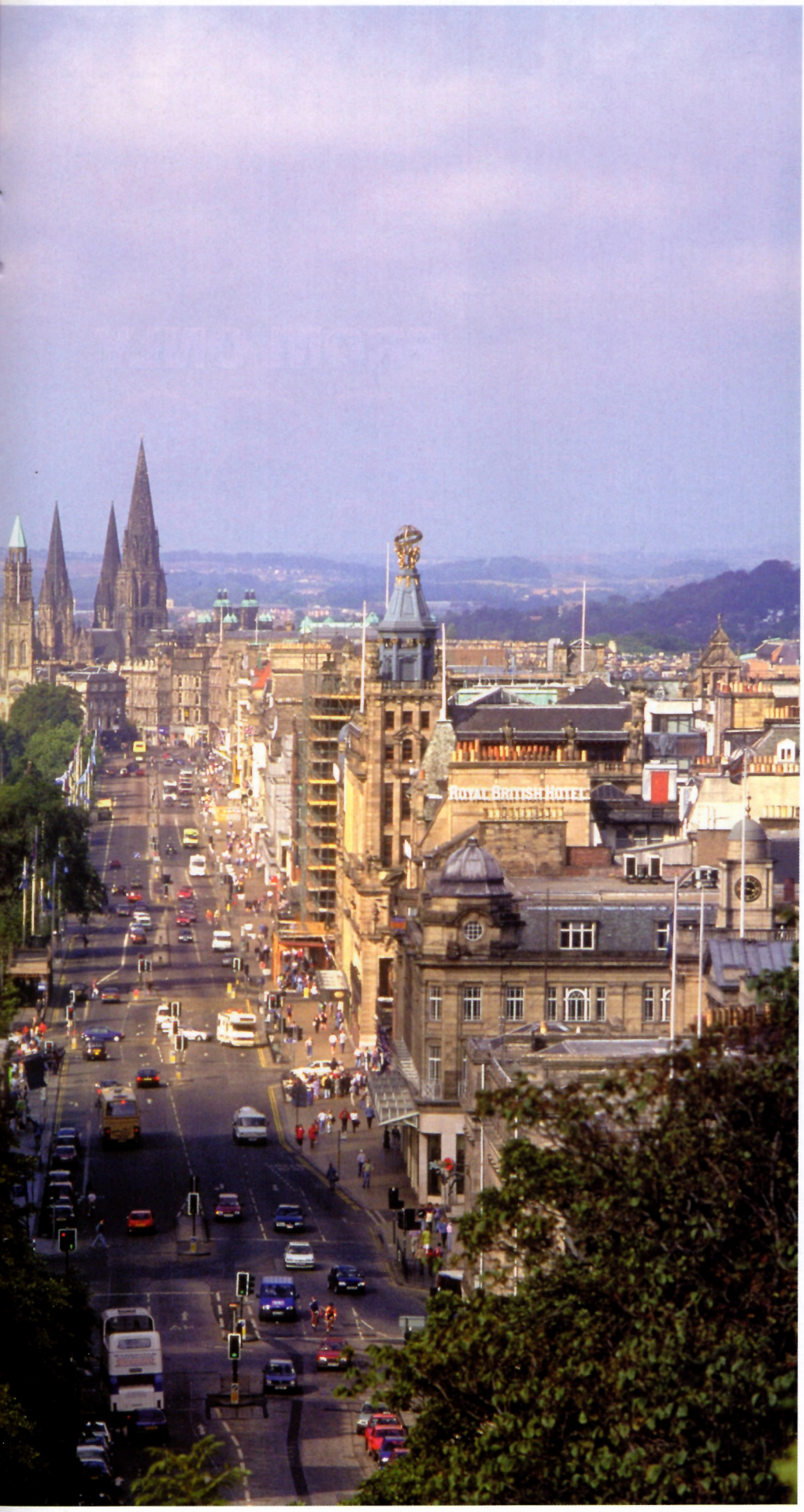
'If we had any gripe, it's the quality of recruitment, both drivers and service staff. At our hotels, 20% of the staff are now Eastern European, simply because they are better staff. The Government doesn't plan on the industry's behalf with vocational education to help us get good personnel.'

Ian Veness, tour manager, Lucketts Travel, Fareham, Hants

'Our acquisition of Worthing Tours has helped us grow our market this year, and the new company is performing very well

'There's no doubt that our traditional customer base likes to do similar things, year in, year out. But this year we have 46 new tours to sell, and we've added air tours to our products.... and that's working well.


Edinburgh: Always a hit with tourists



CBW says....

IT WAS, admittedly, only a mini-survey of business confidence in the tours and excursions market but if the long conversations we had with operators are any indication, there's every good reason for the industry to have a wry smile on its collective face.

In the coach market, there are promising signs that the best of the operators are showing they can compete with air tours – and that they can also join in and sell their own.

Tough though all tourism markets are, there were a number of key indicators last year that coach tourism can not only survive but prosper against really aggressive pricing from the air travel sector. Turnover was, at worst, steady and at best growing, and although low margins continue to be a feature of coach touring, they held up.

In such an aggressive marketplace, the soaring costs of fuel, wages and insurance in particular demand that all operators look closely at costs – the most direct way to get a bottom-line return. One operator, who wanted to remain anonymous, told us that he'd attacked insurances and juggled banking with a dramatic effect. Trying to drive down supply costs such as accommodation is probably unrealistic – margins for our suppliers are also slim, and the net effect may be to drive down quality and damage image. Operators should looks at the nuts and bolts which have no direct effect on customer perception of quality to find the most effective savings.

But there's also need for greater investment in many areas of coach tourism. In particular, operators should certainly be looking at the medium and long term future, and making serious efforts to grow into new consumer groups. Attracting a younger audience may be difficult, but every happy 45-year-old holidaymaker 'converted' to coach tourism now represents at least ten years' more sales. It's a prize worth having.

While operators may shrink from the notion of more brochures, there may be some mileage in looking at each tour to discern its target market, and then consider splitting product into separate markets in the same way. It's possible that by lumping together Turkey and Tinsels in the same brochure as, say, ski or theme park breaks, operators send out a mixed message about their expertise; yet the cost of stapling brochure pages separately for each age market is really not excessive.

One operator told us that he no longer adds the legend 'New Tour' to brochures for the simple reason that his market then believes the tour is looking for guinea pigs, and as a result, they are loathe to book. The message is that operators should approach innovation with more confidence, and carry slightly more 'exotic' products without qualification.

Ticking boxes on a survey form is one thing, but the over-riding message we got from our interviews is that operators have great optimism for 2006. That optimism should leach into tour marketing if coach tourism is to grow in the way it deserves.'

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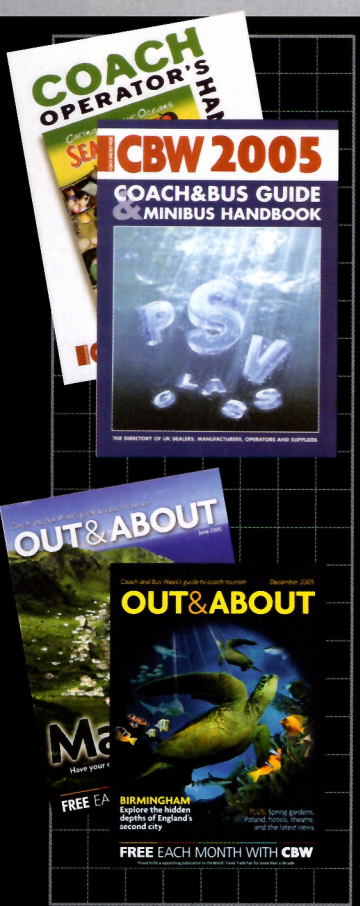

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WILL IT STILL PAY TO INCORPORATE?

Changes to company law rules will affect small private firms like yours

JOHN DAVIES, CBW CORRESPONDENT

GIVEN that the small private company is by far the most common type of limited company, striking the right balance between encouraging business activity and providing reasonable safeguards for is something which governments have an obvious interest. And it is this issue which is at the heart of the Government's Company Law Reform Bill.

The Bill proposes the following changes to current company law rules, which are of special significance to small private companies.

ANNUAL ACCOUNTS

ALL limited companies, public or private, will continue to have to prepare their annual accounts in accordance with the statutory disclosure rules and the overriding 'true and fair' requirement.

But the time allowed for private companies to file their annual accounts with Companies House is coming down from ten months to seven.

And while companies will still be able to file so-called 'abbreviated accounts' with Companies House, instead of their full accounts, in future these abbreviated accounts will have to include details of the company's turnover.

THE COMPANY SECRETARY

CURRENTLY, all limited companies, whether they be listed companies or small husband and wife companies, must appoint a company secretary. The Bill proposes that private companies in future should not be required to appoint a secretary.

In the private company environment, the post of company secretary is seen as something of a formality. Traditionally, the post has been occupied by the spouse of the business owner. Many companies may therefore welcome this change as being one less bit of red tape to worry about.

But, even with the streamlining of red tape which the Bill promotes, being in charge of a company still carries with it important and in some cases onerous obligations for directors – these obligations are in fact being strengthened under the Bill.

THE AGM

CURRENTLY, all companies are subject to a basic legal requirement to hold an AGM once a year. At the AGM, standard business is to be conducted – placing the annual accounts before members, reviewing progress over the previous year and appointing auditors for the next year.

The trouble is, for most private companies, in which owners and managers are often one and the same, this meeting serves no useful purpose. In many cases, of course, the AGM never actually happens but is simply recorded as a fictional minute in the company's books.

A recent change in the law already gives private companies the opportunity to opt out of the AGM. But the new Bill goes further and exempts private companies from any legal requirement to hold an AGM.

WHAT WILL CHANGE?

- Company secretary will not be a legal requirement
- Company accounts to be filed faster – seven months after year end
- AGMs will not be a legal requirement
- Company resolutions will be binding if written
- Stronger directors duties

RESOLUTIONS

THE new Bill will allow private companies to pass legally-binding resolutions by means of written resolutions. And unlike the case at present, a written resolution will not need to attract the unanimous support of all the company's members – as long as the resolution has the same level of support – i.e. simple majority or 75% - that would be necessary if the same resolution were being proposed at a formal meeting, that will be sufficient to make the decision legally valid.

DIRECTORS' DUTIES

WHILE the new Bill will in some ways distinguish more sharply between private companies and public companies, in terms of the amount of regulation to which they are subject, when it comes to the legal responsibilities of company directors, there will be no such distinction. And not only will the legal responsibilities be the same across the board, they are to be substantially strengthened.

For the first time, UK company legislation will set out the essential legal responsibilities of all directors. To some extent, this process will simply re-iterate the legal principles which have been laid down by the courts over the last century and a half. But there are to be important new aspects to directors' duties.

For example, directors are now to be judged not only by reference to the skills and experience that they actually have – this has always been the common law position – but they are now to be judged by reference to an 'objective' standard of skill and care. This means that the law will expect all directors to act in accordance with a minimum standard of skill and care, whatever their backgrounds and whatever the nature of their involvement with their company. Also, although directors will in future owe their legal duties to their company, and not to any outside interests, they will be required to take into account, in the decision-making process, a number of prescribed factors which are basically designed to improve the quality of company decision-making.

Having spent so long at the drafting stage, the Bill is not expected to politically contentious. Therefore, we can expect it to arrive on the statute book by this Spring and come into force shortly thereafter.

John Davies is Head of Business Law at the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants.

BLACKPOOL TRAM HISTORY RELIVED

A NEW book entitled 'A Tribute to Rigby Road Works 1922-2006' written by John Woodman and designed by Zeronorth is being published to mark the fading history of Blackpool's trams.

A local author and tram enthusiast, John Woodman has compiled the information Rigby Road Works, Blackpool Gazette archives, personal records, contributions from the people of Blackpool and tram and transport museums around the country. It is intended to raise public awareness of Blackpool's trams as the system faces changing transport systems, new technology and government regeneration schemes – and could soon become a thing of the past.

Mr Woodman says: "I wrote the book to showcase Blackpool's unique transport system. The network has existed since the 1920s and was a massive municipal undertaking. Trams are part of Blackpool's cultural history and the redevelopment and regeneration plans could mean they will soon become obsolete. I hope the book will raise awareness and help preserve Blackpool's transport for future generations to enjoy."

SAT-NAV FOR UNDER £300

COST-EFFECTIVE satellite navigation systems are becoming more prevalent – the latest being the Bluemedia BM6380 from Evesham.

Its price tag of £299.99 also covers bundled mapping from Destinator Europe. Users have a choice of two or three dimensional views on a 3.5 inch colour touch-screen display. It also has a remote control to simplify in-vehicle operation and can be used to play MP3 music stored via an SD card.

The standard package comes with UK and Ireland mapping, with clear indication on points of interest and speed camera locations.

● For details visit the website at *www.bluemediagps.com*

PEACE OF MIND WITH BREATHALYSER KIT

DRUG and alcohol testing kits are now available through Advanced Rapid Diagnostics.

The kits have been approved by the FDA for use in the transport industry, among others, in the United States and are said to be particularly suited to any application where impairment at work could cause serious injury or death. They also carry the CE mark signifying their approval for use in European countries.

The breath alcohol detector is a disposable indicator unit designed for a once-only use. The average cost per test is around £1.45. The test is fast and delivers clear, distinct results. Subjects are required to blow into the tube for 12 seconds. After two minutes the colour of the crystals can be compared to an indicator to determine blood alcohol concentration.

A number of detectors are available but the 0.2% configuration is recommended for the workplace as it offers a 'no tolerance' rating which is most desirable in an occupational setting.

The drug test kit also costs around £1.45 per time and involves placing a test panel in a sample of urine for 15 seconds. The results are clearly indicated after five minutes and easy to interpret.

● Details from Bert Kolhorn on 0161 708 8820 or Fiona Holgate on 0161 708 8822.

BOOK REVIEW

'THE 50-PLUS MARKET' DICK STROUD

ONE might be forgiven for asking why coach and bus operators, whose market is regarded as being primarily the over 55s, would need to read this book?

I must confess that before starting I was already bothered by the implication that the over 50s formed a homogeneous group. I cannot accept that the 51 year old, healthy, in work and enjoying an active life should fall into the same category as a frail and infirm 85 year old. Have I fallen into the same trap? I should remember that a great number of my good customers are 85, healthy and enjoying an active life.

Had I been asked to précis Dick Stroud's book, I would say 'Generally speaking it is dangerous to generalise'.

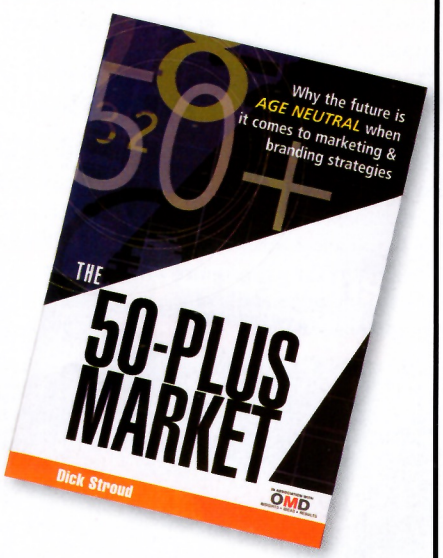
Starting with the proud boast that the author's previous book had correctly predicted the way in which the internet was going to change the world of business; imagine my frustration at having to wade through two thirds of the book before finding anything about the use of the internet. Don't get me wrong; when you get there it is well worth reading. To the point that my own website is being modified to include many of the ideas raised.

The crucial point, that makes you sit up and think, is that the current group of over 50s have more wealth and leisure time than those that came before, and indeed than those that follow. Businesses ignore this at their peril.

Any book that makes you think seriously about your own preconceptions, stereotyping and marketing strategies has to be for the good. Dick Stroud raises points that should be at the forefront of the thinking of anyone looking to attract customers, of any age.

What worries me is that throughout the book the findings of others are set up, and then shot down, yet the author's research findings are based on a quite limited survey which uses some rather too all-encompassing questions.

The cover states that 'the future is age neutral when it comes to marketing and branding'. The content states that marketing is far too heavily focused on the 18 – 35 market. Dick Stroud does not manage to bring these two statements together, he provides ammunition



to help us achieve this aim, and some of it is very good. I am just not sure there is enough.

In truth, unless you have a lot of time to spare, read the appendices, leave the rest.

Sue Reynolds

£25. ISBN: 0 7494 42581
Available from *www.amazon.co.uk*
or by calling 0207 278 0433

Operator: Gordons of Rotherham

COME glorious victory or dismal defeat, Sheffield Wednesday and United players will have somewhere comfortable sit on the way home thanks to Gordons of Rotherham's super executive Plaxton Panther.

But it's not just pampered football stars that will benefit from the latest addition to Gordon's fleet. The coach will also be put to work on the company's burgeoning corporate business.

Gordons bought a similarly highly specified 12m Panther in 2005. Its success has led owner David Gordon to buy a second, only this time at 12.8m long to provide even greater comfort.

Like the existing Panther, the new coach has 34 leather-trimmed reclining seats – most of them grouped round tables – and a comprehensively-equipped galley.

The Fainsa Gala seats have individual headphones to tune into the top-quality in-coach entertainment system which includes DVD and video players, and Sky television.

Gordon said: "We developed the specification for the first coach to meet the needs of the football teams, and also with an eye on the corporate charter market. The first coach has been a tremendous success, so we have now added a second similar vehicle."

Both of the Panthers carry a grey and silver livery, set off by alloy wheels, and are on Volvo B12B chassis with I-shift automated transmission.

Gordons is an established buyer of Plaxton coaches, and one which frequently buys vehicles with unique specifications targeted at particular markets. The company runs Premieres and Paragons equipped to carry wheelchairs, and earlier in 2005 added two lift-equipped 12.8m-long Paragon Plus models to its accessible fleet.

Gordon added: "We buy Plaxton for comfort and quality, but with these new coaches they really have excelled themselves. I'm delighted with them."

FACT FILE

Chassis/ body:	**Volvo B12B/ Plaxton Panther**
Transmission:	**I-Shift**
Seats:	**34 Fainsa Gala**
Spec:	**Galley, DVD/ video/Sky TV, alloy wheels**
Bought from:	**Plaxton**

Operator: Metropolitan Police

THIS distinctive Volvo B7L decker, with East Lancs bodywork, has just been delivered to – the Metropolitan Police, for use as a mobile careers unit.

Volvo says this very different application illustrates the versatility of Volvo Bus to fulfil customers' bespoke requirements.

A Met spokesman says, "We chose Volvo based on recommendation, their reputation and their successful evaluation through the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) procurement process. So far the choice is proving a good one".

The interior has been largely fitted out by the Met's preferred specialist vehicle converter, S MacNeallie & Son in the West Midlands, and includes an impressive number of bells and whistles. The spec sheet runs to 'BridgeClear' low bridge avoidance system, satellite navigation, the standard hands free police radio and a reversing camera. It has two 42" Plasma screens, one outward facing through the lower saloon window fitted with external speakers for outside broadcast, and one at the rear of the upper saloon, both with VCR and DVD capability.

FACT FILE

Chassis/ body:	**Volvo B7L/ East Lancs**
Engine:	**Volvo D7C 215bhp**
Transmission:	**ZF 5 speed automatic**
Spec:	**BridgeClear system, sat nav, reversing camera, 2 plasma screens, VCR/ DVD**
Bought from:	**Volvo Bus**

Orders

THESE pictures are of one of four nearly-finished Volvo Van Hools due to be delivered to Maynes of Mackie in March. It is pictured outside the Van Hool factory in Belgium.

Business is still growing at the well-established Scottish operator – founded in 1947 by James Mayne, and now run by his great grandson Kevin Mayne. The vehicles will be used on UK and European tours, hence the high comfort specification: 49 grand luxe leather trimmed seats, alloy wheels, GPS navigation, CCTV, vacuum, hot/cold drinks, DVD audio and multi CD systems.

If you fancy a closer look, one will be making the 2010km round trip to the Brighton Rally in April.

FACT FILE

Operator:	**MAYNES of BUCKIE**
Chassis/ body:	**Volvo B12B/ Van Hool**
Engine:	**Volvo**
Transmission:	**I-Shift**
Seats:	**49 Grand Luxe leather trim**
Spec:	**Alloy wheels, GPS navigation, CCTV, hoover, hot/cold drinks, DVD/ CD/audio**
Bought from:	**Volvo Coach Sales**

MINIBUS MONTHLY

From 2nd February CBW is producing a 16 page Minibus supplement. This all new monthly publication will include all the Minibus and Accessiblity news along with dedicated articles and products for this specialised industry.

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10660/vsm

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£45,000 + VAT

1988 Plaxton Paramount 3500

Volvo B10M
55 seater, MoT Sept '06
£6,000 + VAT

1989 Jonckheere

Volvo B10M
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£15,000 + VAT

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Volvo B10M
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£9,000 + VAT

1989 Plaxton Paramount 3500

Volvo B10M
49 seater, rear toilet, MoT Sept '06
£12,500 + VAT

1989 Plaxton Paramount 3500

Volvo B10M
53 seater, MoT Oct '06
£10,000 + VAT

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Y REG TOYOTA HIACE

2.4 DIESEL,5 SPEED ,PAS, MEDIUM WHEEL BASE, LOW ROOF, SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH STEP, 3 SEATS 7 TWO WHEEL CHAIR POSITIONS,Q-SRAINT RESTRAINT SYSTEM, RICON FULLY AUTOMATIC TAIL LIFT, ONE OWNER MINT CONDITION , 33,000 miles

Y REG 2001 VOLKSWAGEN TRANSPORTER

2.5TDI AUTOMATIC, POWERED STEERING, MWB, SIDE LOADING DOOR, 5 SEATS PLUS 1 WHEEL CHAIR, UNWIN TRACKING, WITH SIDE MOUNTED RICON TAIL LIFT,ONE OWNER, MINT CONDITION, 33,000 MILES

1999 T REG PEUGEOT BOXER

2.5 DEISEL ,5 SPEED ,PAS, L W B, EUROMOTIVE CONVERSION SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH STEP, 11 SEMI HIGH BACK SEATS , UNWIN TRACKING, RICON TAIL LIFT, 52,000 MILES. V GOOD CONDITION , ONE OWNER

X REG 2001 FORD TRANSIT 2.5 TD

MANUAL,CHASSIS DEVELOPMENT COACHBUILT BODY, PAS, 12 REMOVABLE HIGH BACK SEAT'S,UNWIN TRACKING, RICON TAIL LIFT, POWER DOOR FRONT ENTRY,ONE OWNER, EX LOCAL AUTHORITY, 63,000 MILES CHOICE OF TWO

2000 V REG PEUGEOT BOXER

2.5 DEISEL ,5 SPEED ,PAS, L W B, EXCEL CONVERSION SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH STEP, 12 SEMI HIGH BACK SEATS , UNWIN TRACKING, RICON TAIL LIFT, V GOOD CONDITION , ONE OWNER

51 REG, VOLKSWAGEN LT28

2.5 TURBO DIESEL, PAS, SHORT WHEEL BASE, LOW ROOF, TWIN SIDE LOADING DOORS WITH STEP,8 PASSENGER HIGH BACK SEATS WITH HEADREST, RICON TAIL LIFT, UNWIN TRACKING, MINT CONDITION ONE OWNER, 36,000 MILES. IDEAL TAXIS

X REG PEUGEOT BOXER

2.5 DEISEL ,5 SPEED ,PAS, LONG WHEEL BASE, HIGH ROOF, SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH STEP, 12 SEMI HIGH BACK SEATS , UNWIN TRACKING, RICON TAIL LIFT, V GOOD CONDITION , ONE OWNER

2001 Y REG RENAULT MASTER

MM33, 2.2 DCI ,5 SPEED ,PAS, MWB, O & H CONVERSION SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH AVS STEP, 7 SEATS PLUS 2 WHEELCHAIR SPACES, RICON TAIL LIFT, UNWIN TRACKING, MINT CONDITION ONE OWNER

T REG IVECO 59.12

2.8 DIESEL TURBO, SEMI AUTOMATIC, MELLOR COACHBUILT BODY, P A S, 16 REMOVABLE SEMI HIGH BACK SEAT'S,UNWIN TRACKING, PLS FULLY AUTOMATIC TAIL LIFT, POWER DOOR FRONT ENTRY,ONE OWNER, EX LOCAL AUTHORITY, LOW MILES 66,000 KMS

2003 03 REG RENAULT TRAFFIC 100

1.9 DCI, 5 SPEED ,PAS, SHORT WHEEL BASE, O & H CONVERSION, SIDE LOADING DOOR, 5 SEATS PLUS 1 WHEEL CHAIR, UNWIN TRACKING, RICON TAIL LIFT, ONE OWNER MINT CONDITION ,18,000 miles

T REG 1999 FORD TRANSIT 2.5 TD

MANUAL,CHASSIS DEVELOPMENT COACHBUILT BODY, P A S, 15 REMOVABLE SEMI HIGH BACK SEAT'S,UNWIN TRACKING, RICON UNDERFLOOR TAIL LIFT, SLIDING DOOR FRONT ENTRY,ONE OWNER, EX LOCAL AUTHORITY, 48,000 MILES

04 REG 2004 RENAULT MASTER T35

2.5, 5 SPEED,PAS, LONG WHEEL BASE, MELLOR CONVERSION SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH AVS STEP, 14 SEATS OR 10 PLUS 2 WHEEL CHAIRS, UNWIN TRACKING, RICON TAIL LIFT, MINT CONDITION , 16,000 MILES

02 REG RENAULT MASTER

LM35, 2.5DCI ,5 SPEED ,PAS, LWB, EUROMOTIVE CONVERSION SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH AVS STEP, 10 SEATS , GLIDE RITE LOWERING SUSPENSION WITH FOLD OUT RAMP, UNWIN TRACKING, MINT CONDITION ONE OWNER, 64,000 MILES

VOLSWAGEN LT35 2.5 TURBO DIESEL

NEW UN REGISTERED. LWB, UPRATED TO 3850KGS GVW, 15 ABACUS HIGH BACK SEATS + DRIVER,.SLIDING SIDE DOOR WITH AVS STEP, HIGH ROOF , UNWIN TRACKING, AMF PLS FULLY AUTOMATIC INTERNAL TAIL LIFT, NEW CONVERSION IN STOCK

52 REG RENAULT MASTER

LM35, 2.DCI ,5 SPEED ,PAS, LWB, EUROMOTIVE CONVERSION SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH AVS STEP, 12 SEATS, GLIDE RITE LOWERING SUSPENSION WITH FOLD OUT RAMP, UNWIN TRACKING, MINT CONDITION ONE OWNER, 55,000 MILES

NEW 06 REG, IVECO 40.C13

2.9 TURBO DIESEL IRIS CONVERSION 14 HIGH BACK COGENT SEATS. DOUBLE FRONT PASSENGER SEAT ,SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH AVS STEP, HIGH ROOF, M2 FLOOR, LOT'S OF SPACE, DELIVERY MILEAGE ONLY, IN STOCK.

2002 52 REG FORD TRANSIT 350

LONG WHEEL BASE, TURBO DIESEL, AUTOMATIC, PAS, HIGH ROOF SIDE ENTRY DOOR WITH STEP,12 HIGH BACK SEATS ,UNWIN TRACKING FOR 2 W/CHAIRS RATCLIFF UNDERFLOOR TAIL LIFT,ONE OWNER, VERY LOW MILES 5500 MILES

2001 Y REG FIAT DUCATO

ROHILL TRIAXLE COACHBUILT, 2.8 TURBO DIESEL,PAS, AIR OPERATED SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH LOW ENTRY , 16 HIGH BACK SEATS , GLIDE RITE LOWERING SUSPENSION FOLD OUT PORTARAMP, UNWIN TRACKING, MINT CONDITION ONE OWNER, 48,500 MILES

NEW UN REGISTERED, IVECO 50.C13

2.9 TURBO DIESEL IRIS CONVERSION 16 SEATS. SLAM OR POWER PLUG DOOR, HIGH ROOF ,BONDED WINDOWS , M2 FLOOR, M2 HIGH BACK SEATS UNWIN TRACKING, HEATER, NEW UNDERFLOOR PLS TAIL LIFT, NEW CONVERSION.

NEW UN REGISTERED VOLKSWAGEN LT46

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R REG,MERCEDES SPRINTER 312D

2.8 TURBO DIESEL,UVG LAZER BODY, PAS, LWB, SIDE DOOR, TWIN YORK 4 STRETCHERS, WITH SEAT BACKS, BULK HEAD DOOR, EBERSPACHER HEATER, STROBE BLUES & SIREN,ONE OWNER, GOOD CONDITION, CHOICE OF 5

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04 REG, VOLKSWAGEN LT35

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02 REG, VOLKSWAGEN LT35

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Cummins L10/ZF, 78 seaters, low height, good tests

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1983 Y Reg Leyland Olympian,
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1997/8 R REG DENNIS DARTS SLF,
Cummins/Allison, Plaxton Pointer 2 bodies, 36 seats

1994 L REG DENNIS DART,
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1997 P REG VOLVO OLYMPIANS,
Alexander bodies, 2 doors, 68 seats, or can be single doored and upseated to 78

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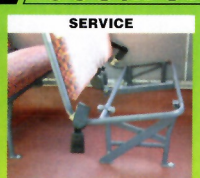

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10470/TRM

APPOINTMENTS & TENDERS

Sales Managers

Mentor Holdings

Mentor Holdings are a one of the largest independent coach dealerships in the UK. We supply a wide range of luxury coaches to clients in the UK and Eire. We are looking to recruit motivated and enthusiastic individuals to sell a new and used products

The Role

The successful candidate will be required to: develop customer relationships to achieve sales targets, identify new opportunities to convert into sales, generate and build new business from new and existing clients to achieve monthly sales targets.

The Candidate

You should be an experienced sales executive with the ability work on your own initiative and make things happen. You will thrive on providing an excellent service. Experience of the coach/bus/motor trade or a background in finance would be an advantage, but not essential. You must be a strong sales negotiator with excellent closing skills and have the ability to communicate at all levels, whilst maintaining and developing long-term business relationships and be able to hit the ground running!

The competitive remuneration package includes an attractive salary, commission, company car and other company benefits.

If you have the relevant skills, are confident in your ability to perform and would like to be part of a successful and forward thinking company, please send your CV in the first instance to:

Mrs Diane Dawson, Sales Manager
Mentor Holdings, Carlton House
Euroway Estate, Rotherham, S66 8QL
Email: diane.dawson@mentorplc.com
www.mentorplc.com

Opportunities in Public transport

Transport Act 1985 Section 89

Operation of Local Bus Services (including schools' transport)

The Transport Executive is updating its list of operators who are interested in tendering for the operation of subsidised local bus services (including some which cater primarily for home-to-school transport).

Operators who would like to be included on the Transport Executive's tender list and do not currently receive copies of invitations to tender should apply in writing to:

A Wright
Team Leader, Bus Services
SYPTE
PO Box 801, Exchange Street
Sheffield S2 5YT

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PEOPLE

Allan Amey to step down at LDV Group

LDV CHIEF executive Allan Amey has announced his retirement and will step down in May as he reaches his 60th birthday.Mr Amey has confirmed LDV Group will be led by an interim CEO, Charles P Megan, currently an operating executive with an affiliate of Sun Capital Partners – LDV's new owners, with immediate effect. Mr Amey will continue to serve LDV in a transitional consulting role until his retirement.

Charles Megan said: "I would like to recognise Allan Amey's many contributions to LDV and wish him well in his retirement. We appreciate his stewardship through the recent transition period and share his optimistic view of the Company's future. We intend to build upon the foundation that Allan has laid.

"The financing package put in place by an affiliate of Sun Capital Partners, Inc. is significant and is expected to enable LDV to continue the growth and development of its award-winning MAXUS range of light commercial vehicles and to accelerate new model development with a range of mini-buses and chassis cab derivatives."

Allan Amey said, "I have had the privilege to lead LDV for the past 12 years. In the last year, we have achieved two major objectives: the launch of the MAXUS product range, which will see the business through the next decade, and the completion of a new financial sponsorship."

RIK PRONK

RIK PRONK, 44, has been promoted to deputy director at the Dutch VDL Group.

He has worked at BOVA for over twelve years since starting as director of BOVA Deutschland. In 2001 he was appointed a member of the management of Autobusfabriek BOVA at the factory in Valkenswaard, near Eindhoven. When VDL bought the business in 2001, he was made managing director of BOVA, a title he retains in addition to his new job.

Robert Butcher joins Unwin

UNWIN Safety Systems, the specialist passenger safety equipment manufacturer, has appointed Robert Butcher as engineering manager.

Mr Butcher is a Chartered Engineer and member of the Institute of Mechanical Engineers. He gained an Honours Degree in Mechanical Engineering and developed extensive knowledge of the automotive restraint industry while developing airbag and seatbelt systems. This work also included responsibility for the environmental, static and dynamic testing of components and full vehicle structures.

FIRST PMT

FIRST PMT has appointed Colin Pierce, 38, as operations manager at its Birkenhead depot. He was previously assistant operations manager for Arriva in St Helens and Birkenhead. Before that he spent six years with Yorkshire Traction in Rotherham. He has also served in the army and worked in the personal finance industry. He is currently studying for membership of the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport.

COLIN BUCHANAN

DAVID QUARMBY CBE has joined leading independent transport consultancy Colin Buchanan as director of Tourism and Transport. He is also chairman of the soon-to-be-wound-up Strategic Rail Authority and the Transport Research Institute.

STAGECOACH

GARY LINE, 48, has been appointed engineering manager at Stagecoach East's Kettering and Corby depots. He was previously fleet operations manager at British Gas for 17 years. He will have 83 vehicles under his control – 58 at Kettering, 30 at Corby – and will be responsible for 28 engineering staff.

EVENTS

2006

January 31 to February 1:
Travel Technology Show, Olympia, London. For tour operators. +44 (0) 20 7970 6546 or see website *www.traveltechnologyshow.com*

February 13 to 16:
CPT London Home Counties Study Tour to the Netherlands, with Bova and Berkhof, Eindhoven and Maastricht. MEMBERS ONLY. Sponsored by P&O Ferries and VVV Maastricht. Fax Ling Tang, CPT, 0207 240 6565 for details

February 13-17:
CPT Scotland Portugal Study Tour. Gail Hume 0131 272 2150, email: *gailhume@cpt-uk.freeserve.co.uk*

February 28:
Reducing Crime on Public Transport Conference, Earls Court One, London. *CBW* media partner. Contact 020 7324 4330, *www.neilstewartassociates.com/li226* for registration, or fax 0207 490 8830

March 1-2:
British Travel Trade Fair, NEC Birmingham.

March 8-9:
Moving On Conference, Crown Plaza Hotel, Glasgow, *www.moving-on-conference.co.uk*, or tel: 0191 241 4523 *www.britishtraveltradefair.com*

March 14-16:
International Road Transport Union 30th World Congress, Dubai World Trade Centre. *www.iru.org*

April 4:
London Transport Awards Dinner, London Hilton. 01224 263134

April 6-7:
30th UK Transport Conference and Exhibition:'Wasted Miles, Wasted Money'. University of Nottingham. Phone CICC: 01223 881622 or *annchapman@CICC-conferences.org.uk*

April 7-9:
Coach Tourism Council/ Bonded Coach Holidays Conference 2006, Llandudno, North Wales. 01227 762200 or email *david.smith@coachtourismcouncil.com*

April 22/23:
UK Coach Rally, Brighton

April 24-26:
CPT Scotland Annual Conference, Gleneagles. Gail Hume 0131 272 2150, email: *gailhume@cpt-uk.freeserve.co.uk*

April 25/27:
CV Show, NEC, Birmingham

May 8/10:
ALBUM Conference, Cardiff. Details: Karen Stafford-Smith 029 2078 7700.

May 9-13:
Motortec automotive show, IFEMA, Madrid, Spain. *www.motortecoline.com*, +34 91 722 3000

May 21-28:
CPT Study Tour 2006, Singapore/ Kuala Lumpur. Details on 0207 240 3131

October 10-12:
CTA Event, G-Mex, Manchester. *www.communitytransport.com*, or call 0870 774 3586

November 7-9:
Euro Bus Expo, NEC. 0870 224 8619, *eurobusxpo@expom.co.uk*

November 24-25:
Coach and Bus Show 2006, RDS, Dublin. Contact *www.cttc.ie*, *c.collins.cttc@ioi.ie*

DIARY

NO-STOP STOP STILL CHERISHED

FOLLOWING on from our story about the bus stop converted into a village shop (*CBW* January 19) news reaches us of a bus stop at which no bus has stopped for five years.

If this stop were merely a pole and sign, or even the Peterborough-style chicken shed, this would be fairly unremarkable, but Walsall campaigner Patrick Kelly is pushing to get the stop moved because, at the time of building, it cost £18,000.

Designed as a showcase, state-of-the-art shelter for the weary traveller, the stop was erected, appropriately, outside of the Walsall College of Arts and Technology. However, the opening of Walsall's new bus station – or Road-Going Public Transportation Interchange Solution, in modern parlance – made the stop redundant in 2000. It is apparently still in use as a coach stop, but observers note that it is on the wrong side of the road, and coach passengers gaze lovingly across at it while shivering outside Boots, the place coaches actually pull up.

"The shelter will remain there, as it could be brought into use immediately if there was a problem with a bus stop at the bus station," is Centro's desperate retort, adding: "We are looking to make the 'Temporarily Out of Use' sign more prominent."

Mr Kelly notes that this piece of prime real estate hasn't been vandalised and, as a further example of Centro's love for White Elephants, is cleaned on a regular basis.

Sounds to us like a prime site for conversion into a Tie Rack or news stand....

2 MINUTE INTERVIEW

FULL NAME: Graeme Barnett
AGE: 42
OCCUPATION: Exhibition director, World Travel Market & BTTF
WHAT SHAPE IS THE COACH AND BUS INDUSTRY IN?: It would appear to be in a good state (from an outsider's point of view)
WHAT ANNOYS YOU MOST ABOUT IT?: The poor condition of some vehicles drags the perception of the operators down
WHO, IF ANYONE, WILL ALWAYS BE REMEMBERED FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE INDUSTRY, AND WHY?: Phil Bustin, Coach Drivers Club – he is always positive in his outlook and will do anything he can to help, whatever the request
WHICH EVENT OF THE LAST 50 YEARS HAS CAUSED IT THE MOST DAMAGE?: Any accident that receives widespread mainstream press coverage will always cause the industry damage
WHAT WAS THE PROUDEST MOMENT IN YOUR WORKING LIFE?: Moving World Travel Market to ExCel in 2002 – proving against the odds and against the industry's view that we could run an even better event than at Earls Court
WHAT'S THE PUNCHLINE OF YOUR FAVOURITE JOKE?: "That sounds very interesting, but next time dial 9 for an outside line first"
WHO, WHETHER ALIVE OR DEAD, FICTIONAL OR REAL, WOULD YOU LIKE TO HAVE AS PASSENGERS ON A LONG JOURNEY?: The combined squads of England's 1966 World Cup Winning Squad, England's World Cup Winning Rugby squad and England's Ashes winning team – just think of the chat, the banter and the sing-song! (and the weight of the coach! – Ed)
AND WHERE WOULD YOU MOST LIKE TO BE HEADING?: Anywhere away from the office

Reducing Crime on Public Transport 2006

Ensuring Passenger and Staff Safety

Tuesday 28th February 2006
Earls Court One, London SW5

In association with: Home Office

Supported by: CRIMESTOPPERS 0800 555 111 Call anonymously with information about crime

Crime and the fear of crime affects everyone who works on or uses public transport. For the public it is imperative that they feel safe not only when they are using transport but also when they are travelling to and from stations, whilst for staff it is essential that they feel safe whilst they are working and are confident that they are supported.

Bringing together speakers and delegates from transport operators, local police forces and The British Transport Police, The Crown Prosecution Service, passenger transport associations, and other key stakeholders, this important conference will discuss how to build effective partnerships to tackle and reduce crime on and around public transport through joint working and information sharing, and explore how to build public confidence in services to ensure that they are accessible to all.

The conference will also provide an opportunity to share best practice and develop new strategies to develop a safer transport network.

Speakers include:

Roger Fisher, Head of the Fear of Crime Team, Home Office

Jeroen Weimar, Director of Transport Policing and Enforcement, Transport for London

Sergeant Phil Bennett, Principal Architectural Liaison Officer, British Transport Police

Councillor Tony Page, Transport Spokesman, Environment Board, Local Government Association (LGA), Cabinet Member (responsible for Community Action), Reading Council, Chair of Reading Buses and Member, Thames Valley Police Authority

Sue Nelson, Head of Community Safety, Rail Industry Community Safety Support Unit

Leo Markham, Officer for Wales, Bus Users UK

To see the full agenda, visit
www.neilstewartassociates.com/li226

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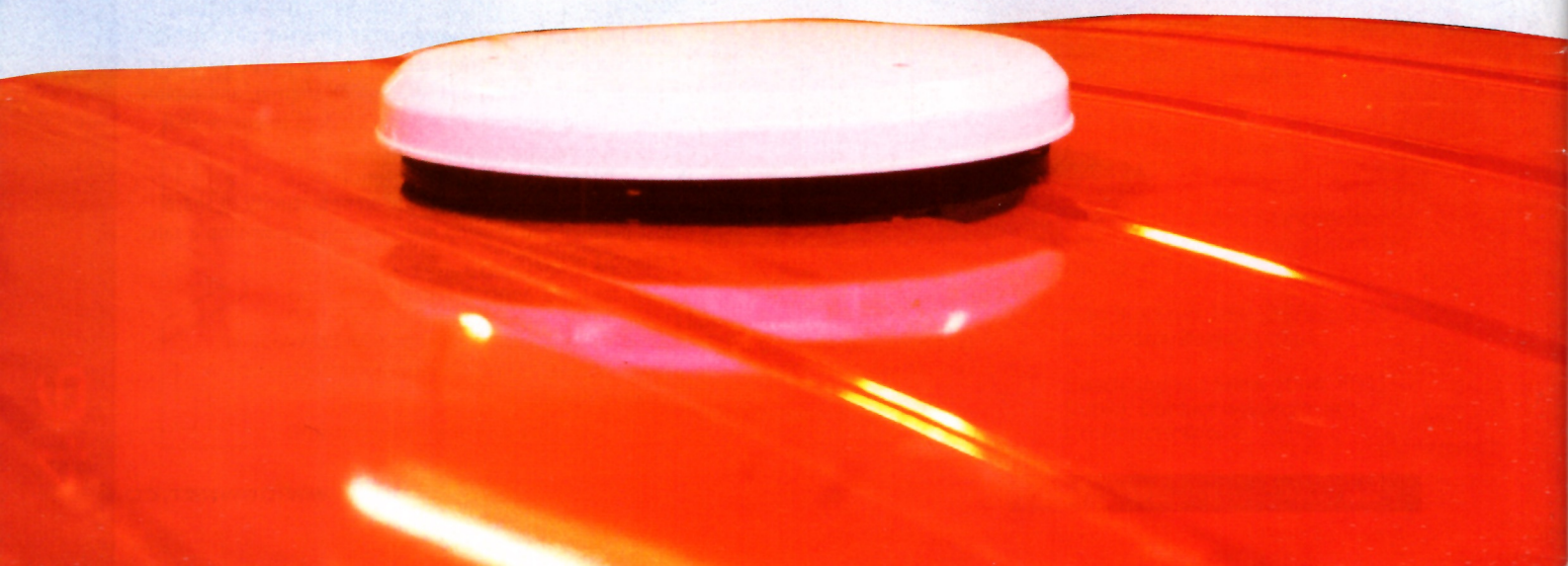
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